

THE
FAMILY INSTRUCTOR;
OR, A
REGULAR COURSE
OF
Scriptural Readings;

WITH
FAMILIAR EXPLANATIONS
AND
PRACTICAL IMPROVEMENTS,
ADAPTED TO THE PURPOSE OF
DOMESTIC AND PRIVATE EDIFICATION,
FOR EVERY DAY IN THE YEAR.

BY JOHN WATKINS, LL. D.

That nation must always be powerful where every man performs his duty;
and every man will perform his duty that considers himself as a being, whose
condition is to be settled to all eternity by the laws of Christ.

DR. JOHNSON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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THE
FAMILY INSTRUCTOR,
8c

MAY THE FIRST.

THE DEATH OF ABNER.

2 Samuel, iii. 38.—*Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel?*

THE Inspired Volume may justly be denominated the history of human nature; for here the passions and their effects are so exactly described in the conduct of persons moving in every sphere of life, that the prince may derive wisdom from the same lessons which teach his subjects obedience, and inculcate practical virtue upon all classes of society. For the proof of this an appeal might be made to that part of the Sacred Records which narrates the life and reign of David, where, without the slightest appearance of art, the causes of events are traced to those springs of action which the intelligence of man may suspect in many cases, but cannot determine with certainty in any. Here also we perceive the operation of Providence in bringing good out of evil, by converting designs, formed against the decrees of Heaven, into instruments for accelerating their establishment. The civil war raised by Abner in support of the house of Saul, did not terminate with the battle

of Gibeon; though in that contest, and its consequences, the general might have seen how vain it was to oppose what God had appointed. A mistaken notion of honour led this commander into the rash act of resisting the Divine authority; but while he deceived himself with the idea that fidelity to the royal succession was his sole motive, his affections were under the influence of another impulse. Till Ishbosheth imprudently quarrelled with him for having taken one of his master's concubines, Abner adhered firmly to the house of Saul, and strengthened it by the vigilance of his administration. But this reproof touched him to the quick, and discovered the latent movements of his heart. He reproached Ishbosheth for his ingratitude, and acknowledged in the warmth of resentment the justice of those claims which it was his duty to have examined before he drew the sword. So slight are the ties which bind men together when religion is not the principle of their union, and they are actuated merely by a regard to temporal convenience, the sense of honour, or private attachment. Abner behaved with generosity in supporting the throne of Ishbosheth, but he would have acted better in submitting at first to the decision which had allotted the inheritance to another person, whose merits he well knew, and whose title was beyond dispute.

Still the general manifested a spirit perfectly disinterested, since, with the power which he possessed, nothing could be more easy than to have deposed the feeble monarch whom he had advanced, or to have excited an insurrection against him. But neither a sense of the wrong he had received, nor the popularity which he enjoyed, could induce Abner to take any steps for his own aggrandizement. He did indeed enter into a negotiation with the king of Judah, but he formed no conspiracy against Ishbosheth, unless the convening of the states of Israel

be placed in that invidious light. So far, however, was this measure from being wrong, that Abner stands justly blameable for not having had recourse to it before; in which case much blood would have been saved, many feuds prevented, and his own life prolonged to a good old age. From his declaration in this assembly, it is evident that the elders of Israel were favourable to the rights of David, on the strongest of all grounds, that of religious obedience to the authority which imparted them. These princes had hitherto been prevented from following their wishes by the influence of the minister; but no sooner was this restraint removed, than they cheerfully acceded to the proposition made to them; and even Benjamin, though naturally most partial to the family of Saul, came into the same resolution for the general good. Having thus secured the consent of the states, the general repaired to Hebron, where he was entertained with a solemn feast, and then departed to fulfill his promise to David: "I will gather all Israel unto my lord the king, that they may make a league with thee, and that thou mayest reign over all that thine heart desireth."

This great design he was not permitted to execute, being cut off on his way homewards by the treachery of Joab, out of revenge, as he pretended, for the death of Asahel, but moved in reality by the black passions of malice and jealousy. The manner in which this murder was committed, exceeds in malignity all that is recorded of the savage ferocity of ancient nations; though unhappily it has not been without parallels in days of boasted virtue and knowledge. It was an offence compounded of political craft and personal animosity; enmity to the man, and envy of his powers. When Joab heard how Abner had been treated, he hastened to the king, and reprehended him for suffering one to escape, whom the traitor described as marked by features,

which were nothing more than the reflected image of his own foul mind. He described Abner as one who had covert designs upon the throne, and therefore affected friendship, that he might observe the goings out and the comings in of David, and all that he did.. This attempt of Joab to prejudice his master, was done with an intent to lessen the horror of the deed which the wretch was meditating, and to make the king believe that nothing but zeal to his service and the good of the nation prompted the dreadful act. Joab, on quitting the royal presence, dispatched messengers to recall Abner, and having got him apart from his guards, "smote him under the fifth rib, and he died." Thus fell the accomplished leader of the armies of Israel, not by the hand of an ordinary assassin, the brutality of whose nature might have rendered the crime less remarkable, but by one of his own high rank and profession, who knew the law of arms and the law of God, both of which forbid the taking a foul advantage even of an enemy. The character of Abner, with the exception of a few failings, exhibits the various qualities which are requisite in an elevated station; undaunted valour and pure benevolence, a high sense of loyalty, and an earnest desire to promote the welfare of the people. Well then might David lament the loss of so great a man, and be shocked at the wickedness by which he was deprived of his services at a time when they were especially wanted to heal the breaches of the kingdom. But lately invested with the ensigns of royalty, and surrounded by ambitious courtiers, who were as ready to rebel against him as to serve him, the young monarch saw in this transaction the insecurity of his own state, while he had to mourn for a grief which he could not punish. "And the king said unto his servants, Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel? And I am this day weak, though anointed king: and these

men, the sons of Zeruiah, be too hard for me. The Lord shall reward the doer of evil according to his wickedness." This is a faithful sketch of every society where the government becomes enfeebled by the corruption of morals, the contentions of parties, and the encroachments of faction. Such was the condition in which David found Israel and Judah where the want of religion produced a contempt of the laws, and the chief magistrate may be said to have borne the sword in vain, as he had not the power to use it without endangering his own life and involving the country in a new war. But though Joab escaped the immediate reward of his iniquity, Divine vengeance visited upon him the blood of the innocent, agreeable to the prediction of his sovereign; for having completed the measure of his crimes by rebellion, he fell, grasping for security the horns of the altar. Like too many who have grown old in wickedness, the traitor thought himself safe in the tabernacle of God, and sheltered under the forms of religion; but Solomon being sensible that justice as well as mercy must consecrate the sanctuary, ordered him to be slain even in the holy place. "The Lord," said the king, "shall return his blood upon his own head, who fell upon two men more righteous and better than he, and slew them with the sword, my father David not knowing thereof, to wit, Abner, the son of Ner, captain of the host of Israel, and Amasa, the son of Jether, captain of the host of Judah. Their blood shall therefore return upon the head of Joab, and upon the head of his seed for ever; but upon David, and upon his seed, and upon his house, and upon his throne, shall there be peace for ever from the Lord." 1 Kings, ii. 32, 33.

MAY THE SECOND.

THE FATE OF UZZAH.

2 Samuel, vi. 7.—*And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah, and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the hand of God.*

ONE of the chief sources of infidelity, and the cause of much licentiousness in practice, is the delusion by which men cheat themselves into a belief that error is innocent. With respect to men in their relation to each other as members of society, nothing can be more certain than that no human power has authority over religious opinions; but the question is of a very different nature, as it affects the character and conduct of the mind in its connexion with the Author of all truth. The mistaken notions of another man ought not to abate our charity towards him; but at the same time the consideration of them should make us more watchful over our own thoughts, diligent in the use of means, and humble in the acquisition of knowledge. Divine things must be studied in a very different manner from those of sense; for we must remember that God is in heaven and we upon earth; that his thoughts are not our thoughts, and that all we can learn of his will must be through the medium of his own revealed word. With such a rule then in our possession, no error is innocent that sets the human judgment to decide what has been already determined by the unerring standard of wisdom and holiness. Every attempt to refine away an express declaration, or to lower the obligation of a precept, whatever may be the success of it among men, will be regarded as little short of rebellion against the majesty of Him who imparted the one for faith and the other for obedi-

ence. Some there are who consider the Sacred Volume as a treasure of various curiosities, calculated rather for speculative observation, than for the government of the temper and the regulation of life. To persons of this inquisitive disposition notions are of more importance than duties; and that which the Father of Lights has mercifully given to be a lamp unto our feet in this dark and corrupt world, that we may attain a higher and better state, is made the subject of critical investigation and of endless dispute, where reason, which should be guided by revelation, is established over it as a judge. This naturally tends to generate pride and vain confidence; so that the man who fancies himself wise above what is written, intermeddles with the Scriptures as he would with the unhallowed compositions of human genius; applying his own principles and ideas to explain what his sagacity never could have discovered. But the evil attending religious error is not merely of a private concern, offensive to God and subversive of moral improvement; it is in fact injurious to society, as every one infected with it endeavours to contaminate his neighbour; and the more pernicious the delusion is, the greater desire and zeal he will show to spread its influence. The force of example is proportioned to the reputation of the person who sets it, and the degree of interest excited in the mind; if, therefore, delusive doctrines are promulgated by one who ranks high for learning or sanctity, he may not only poison the present generation, but sow the seeds of mischief for many ages to come. It cannot then be matter of wonder that the Scriptures should abound with strong warnings against false principles in religion; but we may well be astonished to see error treated as harmless and indifferent by men who profess to believe in the Divine authority of these writings. The very fact of giving a revelation shows the importance of truth; and the numerous

injunctions to maintain it inviolate, express as forcibly the danger of explaining away the smallest part of it for our convenience, or of adding to the law of God any thing of human device to please our fancy. Many instances might also be produced to prove that nothing is trivial which God has imparted, nor any thing indifferent which he hath commanded. The fate of Uzzah is a remarkable circumstance, and stands as a perpetual lesson of caution to avoid all intrusion in holy things, where the direction is settled and the prohibition is absolute; for though it happened while the Mosaic dispensation was in force, it was recorded "for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come." 1 Cor. x. 11. When David signified his intention of removing the ark from the house of Abinadab, it was the duty of the Levites to have carried it upon their shoulders; instead of which they placed it upon a new cart, drawn by two oxen. This was the manner in which the ark came into their possession; but what might be commendable in Philistines, was inexcusable in Jews, whose profession taught them the forms of their ritual, and the penalties by which they were guarded. The first error was followed by another; for Uzzah thinking the ark in danger of falling, put forth his hand to support it, contrary to an express statute, and was struck dead on the spot. The offence and the punishment appeared so disproportionate, even to David, that fearing lest a similar judgment might fall upon himself, he caused the ark to be deposited in the house of Obad-edom, where it remained till the apprehensions of the king subsided, by his being better informed; and then he brought up the holy vessel to the tabernacle with great rejoicing. In the conduct and fate of Uzzah, the people were taught that negligence in religious duty is displeasing to God, who will not be served by the breach of his laws; nor allow man to deter-

mine the manner of observing his ordinances. This Levite probably acted without any bad design, but it became him to acquire a thorough knowledge of the trust committed to his care; since any error in the discharge of it, though the effect of ignorance only, was likely to prove injurious to the community, who seeing holy things treated irreverently, would in time contract an aversion not only to the forms but to the very substance of religion. "All things should be done to edifying;" but if we take upon ourselves to settle what doctrines and rules are best adapted for that purpose, we shall be found guilty of encroaching upon the prerogative of God, and of rendering as far as lies in our power his word of none effect. Let us then, as members of the body represented by the material ark of the covenant, take heed how we profane that holy structure by any conceits of our own; "for other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." 1 Cor. iii. 12.

MAY THE THIRD.

PROMISE OF THE MESSIAH.

2 Samuel, vii. 16, 17.—*Thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever. According to all these words, and according to all this vision, so did Nathan speak unto David.*

THERE are few chapters in the Hebrew Scriptures of equal importance with the present, and yet hardly any one has been rendered so obscure by want of care in the translation. If we seriously attend to the evidences of the Messiah, adduced in the New Testament, we shall find that among others one of the principal relates to his descent as the son of

David and the son of Abraham. In the genealogical history of our Saviour, this point is particularly regarded, and the feature of his royal origin is marked with sufficient accuracy; but though the life of David occupies a considerable portion of the Old Testament, we meet with no such promise made to him, unless it be contained in this message from God by the mouth of Nathan. The Psalms indeed exhibit numerous testimonies of David's faith in the great article of redemption through Christ; but prophetic as these sublime compositions are, it is not to them that we must look for the decree upon which the universal expectation of the Jews was founded. As the hope of this people has been invariably accompanied by the persuasion that their deliverer shall be of the house and lineage of David, our observation must be directed to their acknowledged records for the ground of this assurance. But no declaration of this nature can be found any where except in this answer to the proposal of the promonarch to build a temple in honour of Jehovah. The offer was rejected; but then a blessing was given, and that in terms which evidently pointed to something more than a temporal establishment or an earthly throne. After enumerating the mercies bestowed upon David and upon Israel, the prophet goes on to describe another scene far more glorious, to rise at a distant period, under a sovereign whose dominion shall be extensive and everlasting. This promise, when correctly rendered, runs in these words: "When thy days are fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will confirm the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son; in bearing iniquity I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the scourges of the

children of Adam: yet my mercy shall not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I removed from before thee. But thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever, before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever." However magnificent might be the reign of Solomon, it was too limited and mixed for this ample and splendid prediction. It is true he built a temple to the glory of God, but this superb structure perished; and in the days of his son the throne of David was shaken by a revolution, in which ten tribes separated and formed another kingdom. The fulfilment of this prophecy, therefore, must be sought for in some other person, and under very different circumstances from any of whom we read in the Old Testament; because in no case do we there find an establishment so permanent as that here foretold, nor any character correspondent in all respects to the very remarkable one here delineated. Both the kingdom and this identical sovereignty are said to be eternal, which could not be affirmed, even hyperbolically, of any empire, however mighty, nor of any conqueror with all his power and acquisitions.

That the literal sense of the declaration failed, as it applied to the dynasty of David, we have just seen, in the division of the kingdom, which took place not many years after his death; consequently the prophecy has either received its accomplishment in another form, or it yet remains to be fulfilled. If there are any who look upon it as a thing still to come, they must account satisfactorily for the suspension of the promise in the long interval that has elapsed from the extinction of the house of David, as the ruler of Israel. During this period the throne has been actually annihilated, and the posterity of that prince lost in the general dispersion of the seed of Jacob. Thus far, then, it cannot be maintained with any degree of consistency, that the house or

family of David has been established; and even if one of this line should hereafter regain the dominion of his ancestors, and miraculously collect the scattered race of Israel into their own land, it will be extravagant to call that a perpetual sovereignty which was destroyed for many ages. Regard to Scriptural verity then compels us to seek for a spiritual interpretation of the message; and here we shall need no farther help than what is afforded by the language of the promise, and the illustration which it receives from other prophecies. The person of whom it is spoken is distinguished by two remarkable characteristics, denoting high dignity and extreme humiliation. Though expressly called the Son of God, he is represented as suffering for our iniquity, and chastised with the stripes due to the children of men. But it is plain that this punishment is not for personal demerit, because, throughout, the subject of it stands distinguished by paternal affection, is chosen to be the founder of the acceptable building for the service of Jehovah, and is finally constituted an everlasting king. To human conception, indeed, it may seem strange, that one perfectly innocent in himself should suffer correction, or endure the judgment of malefactors; but the evangelical prophet has described this voluntary act of the Messiah in terms which explain both the cause and the effect of the decree: "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed." Is. liii. 5. In all this we certainly perceive nothing like the pomp and splendour usually attached to the idea of royalty; and yet this very degradation is the basis of that holy structure, concerning which such glorious images are accumulated to set forth its extent and perfection. This is the language of the Divine Person, to whom David and all the prophets bore witness as the Lord of Life

and the Redeemer of Man: "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation; he that believeth shall not make haste." Is. xxviii. 16.

The house then which the descendant of David was to build, must have been something more than a material edifice; for to nothing of that kind could the assurance of immutability be applied. The same may be said of the kingdom which this wonderful person was to establish; for it would be no less extravagant to call any human society eternal, than to make the disgrace and suffering of the founder necessary to its formation and security. Temporal grandeur must be supported by adequate means, in the number of which, pain and poverty, ignominy and distress, cannot be considered without doing violence to every feeling of the heart and sentiment of the understanding. Yet the accounts of the Redeemer, upon which the faith of the ancient church was fixed, agree in describing him as a sufferer. This was exhibited in the affecting scene upon Mount Moriah, when the Patriarch, in obedience to the Divine mandate, appeared ready to sacrifice his obedient son: the same truth was imparted to David; and in the prophecies of which he was the inspired author, the exaltation of the Saviour is always preceded by a view of Him in the circumstances of bodily affliction and mental agony. One of the most striking of these is the second Psalm, where the kingdom of Christ is painted in bold and glowing colours; but even there we find this illustrious Person previously enduring the fiercest persecution from the principalities and rulers of this world, before his establishment upon the holy hill of Zion. Here then is a full and perfect comment upon the promise recorded in the history of David, and as such it has been pronounced by an evangelical expositor, who refers to the original decree, and the prophetic

explanation of it, in these direct terms: "Unto which of the angels said God at any time, 'Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee?' And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son?" Heb. i. 5. If it be asked when the era of this glorious kingdom commenced, and by what sign or public act it was celebrated, the most satisfactory reply may be given by directing the inquirer to the majestic spectacle on the mountain in Galilee, when the risen and triumphant Jesus, before his ascension, thus addressed his surrounding disciples: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." Matt. xxviii. 18—20.

MAY THE FOURTH.

THE FALL OF DAVID.

2 Samuel, xi. 27.—*But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord.*

A STATE of prosperity is often most dangerous to virtue, by giving indulgence to the passions, and opening new sources of temptation. The man who has various cares to occupy his attention, and constant employment for his thoughts, finds his time little enough for the necessities which are to be supplied and the duties which he has to discharge. But when his anxieties lessen, and the enjoyment of accumulated wealth renders concern for the future a matter of indifference, he is apt to say, with the voluptuary in the parable, "Soul, thou hast much

goods laid up for many years : take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." Luke, xii. 19. We are inclined to pity him who has to struggle through life in continual penury ; but our commiseration, perhaps, would be more properly bestowed upon the lord of the soil which the poor man cultivates by his labour. The dangers of the one are multiplied with his possessions, while the constant but limited wants of the other keep him regularly employed, and by determining his pursuits moderate his expectations. He that is placed above the urgency of business stands in the greater need of diligence to preserve him from the snares which are spread in abundance for the idle and the affluent, in a world that knows no middle state between good and evil, the activity of virtue and the folly of vice. Numerous instances illustrative of this truth are to be found in the Sacred Records, where we observe that the servants of the Most High were distinguished by their industry ; and it is said of the great Exemplar of all righteousness, that " he went about doing good." Acts, x. 38.

But the history of David affords remarkable proofs of both cases ; the advantages arising from a life of exertion, though mixed with suffering, and the fatal effects of carnal ease and security, to a mind grounded in the principles of religion and habitually disposed to the practice of its rules. In his early days, when he kept his father's sheep at Bethlehem, remote from the attractions of the world, he not only enriched his mind with Divine wisdom, but acquired strength and firmness by vigorous exercise. Even the glorious victory which made him the object of popular applause, excited in him no vanity, nor caused him to turn aside from the path of prudence. He deported himself in the court of Saul with so much moderation, that the jealous eye of the monarch could neither discover any fault in his temper nor error in his conduct. But he appeared with still

greater lustre in the storm of persecution, when, to use his own language, he was "hunted as a partridge upon the mountains," and his faith being overpowered, he exclaimed, "I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul." Through all these trials he displayed a spirit of modesty and resignation, liberality and piety, which endeared him to his friends and commanded the respect of his enemies. He behaved with similar fortitude and generosity after his accession, till the whole kingdom was reduced to obedience, and he had nothing more to dread. But this state of internal security, which should have increased his diligence and circumspection, as bringing with it new and great obligations of duty, produced an opposite effect; and the man who had so long maintained his purity unsullied under the darkest cloud of distress, fell by a single stroke of temptation in the calm season of tranquil enjoyment, and possessed of wealth and honour. The iniquity was aggravated by a variety of circumstances; and in the whole procedure we nowhere find that the royal offender manifested the smallest compunction of heart for the atrocious enormities which he had committed. Indolence seems to have been the source of all these evils; for, contrary to the accustomed usage and the nature of his high office, David suffered the army to march against the Philistines while he remained inactive in the capital. The charge of negligence is plainly conveyed in the observation of the historian, that it was the time of the year when the kings went forth upon military service; but that the Israelites, instead of being encouraged by the presence of their sovereign, were led to war by an inferior general. When a man abandons his proper concerns to the management of others, he is not far from mischief or destruction; and while he thinks himself secure in fancied innocence and strong in virtuous resolution, the deceiver of souls, who watches all opportunities

with vigilance, contrives to inflame his passions and to betray him into error, by objects which in the midst of business would have passed unheeded. Thus it was in the present instance; for when David should have been in the field, he lay inglorious in his palace; the consequence of which was, that on seeing a beautiful woman he became enamoured of her charms before he made any inquiry concerning her condition. That time which he ought to have employed in reflecting upon his danger, and flying from it, was devoted to criminal intrigue and the most treacherous designs against the honour and life of a faithful servant, who was engaged in fighting the battles of his country. The whole of the history is deepened with so many shades of guilt, that the mind recoils from the contemplation of it; while we cannot but admire the rigid fidelity of the Sacred Writer in recording the lapse of this great monarch with all the variety of circumstances which render his conduct wholly without excuse. But the instruction to be derived from the narrative is of the greatest importance, as it shows in the strongest light the deceitfulness of the human heart, and the absolute necessity of a strict government over the thoughts and the passions. This consideration renders incessant application and unwearied exertion indispensibly necessary, that, by cultivating every virtuous principle, and removing whatever has any tendency to vitiate the imagination, the mind may grow in grace, and be equally prepared to resist the assaults or the insinuations of the adversary. We are then in the most imminent peril when we feel most confident in ourselves, and satisfied with our past endeavours, little thinking that every new situation in life brings with it new cares and employments, temptations and duties. David fell by judging, that, having already done and suffered so much, he might now sit at his ease, and indulge himself in luxury, by which means

means his corrupt desires were more quickly inflamed, while the faculty of conscience was not in a state to resist and suppress them. The Great Teacher of moral and divine truth, who knew what was in man and all the secret springs of action, has forcibly described the bane attending this supine disposition in the parable of "a man that sowed good seed in his field; but while they whose province it was to keep it, slept, the enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way." Would we avoid the misery which must result from these evils, either in the present life or in the next, let it be our constant labour to watch over all our affections with unre-mitted diligence, remembering the declaration of the same blessed Instructor; "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: but I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." Matt. v. 27, 28.

MAY THE FIFTH.

REPENTANCE OF DAVID.

2 Samuel, xii. 7.—*And Nathan said unto David,
Thou art the man.*

MAN may fall into sin either by the artifice of the tempter, the enticements of his own lust, or by the combination of both causes; but he cannot raise himself from that state of vassalage and corruption by any efforts of his own, because the powers of his will are reluctant to good, even when conscience alarms him by a view of his danger. The first human transgressor upon record sought, indeed, to cover his shame and to hide himself from the scrutiny of Infinite Holiness; but he had no proper sense of his

guilt till he was called from his lurking-place by the voice of God. It was the same with Peter, who became more obstinate upon every fresh charge, and by adding blasphemy to falsehood, manifested a determined spirit to deny his Master, even without the ordinary plea of importunity and necessity. He might as easily have retired from the scene when first accused, as when he had completed the climax of iniquity; but nothing short of a searching look from Him to whom all hearts are open, and from whom no secrets are hid, could bring him to repentance. Thus also David, who had so much the fear of man as to commit murder, that he might screen his adultery, remained almost a year without feeling any other concern; being more solicitous to preserve his reputation, than to gain that peace which passeth all understanding. This is commonly the case with sinners in general, the most hardened of whom are extremely desirous of obtaining a name for some virtue, even among their associates, and would be very unwilling to be considered as having lost all credit in the world. The king of Israel, indeed, with the exception of this particular, was deserving of popularity, and entitled to the confidence of his subjects; but when he endeavoured to cover his original error by the most infamous devices, we shudder at the melancholy picture of human nature exhibited in the conduct of a man who in other respects was one of its brightest ornaments. This dark and disgusting spectacle affords a strong proof in illustration of the prophetic description; "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" Jer. xvii. 9. That one, who upon other occasions discovered such a tender disposition and lively sensibility, should have continued so long in this sinful course without expressing any signs of remorse and penitence, may seem very extraordinary; but it does appear probable, may

from the whole course of this history it amounts to a certainty, that David, with much excellence of character, wanted as yet that one thing needful, the right knowledge of himself. His spiritual deadness amidst such dreadful crimes, and when every object in his view was calculated to bring his primary sin to remembrance, shows that he had little idea of inward purity, or apprehension of Infinite Justice. The very means adopted for his conviction may be considered as affording no slight evidence in support of this opinion; for the prophet was not sent to denounce the Divine indignation against the royal offender, in the thunder of majestic eloquence, but with a mild and instructive lesson, couched in the form of an affecting parable. This beautiful apologue was so naturally drawn, and pathetically told, that David took the whole for a real fact, which having occurred under his government, required an immediate investigation and an exemplary punishment. But if the story be touching, the application was gentle, and all the calamities denounced were of a temporal nature; which to a mind conscious that separation from God is the only true misery, must have been matters of trifling concern, and rather to be called mercies than judgments. It has been a common notion, that the prophet communicated the reproof with which he was entrusted in this manner, out of cautious prudence that he might avoid giving offence to the king by a more direct accusation. But this could not have been the reason, because the word and commandment of God never stood in need of such an accommodation to human caprice; nor do we read that any inspired person acted with timidity when invested with an authority superior to that of royalty. Besides, there was nothing in the temper of David to render such management necessary; for we no where find him behaving with violence, even under the most heinous provocations, and when some

keen resentment might have been justified by the aggravating injuries with which he was treated. The truth is, this parable, like all the others which had a Divine Author, concealed religious instruction, adapted to every age and station of life, no less than to the particular circumstances of the man for whose use it was originally imparted. By the rich man and his poor neighbour, were undoubtedly intended the king of Israel and his faithful servant; but what we are to understand of the traveller, may admit of some inquiry. All the figures in the piece have their appropriate objects, so that what is personal in the one has its correspondent in the application. While, however, the principal characters admit of no doubt, the third is commonly thrown deep into shade, as of little influence in the scene, or as an article of subordinate machinery, necessary only to the construction of the fable. By this misapprehension one of the great moral uses is weakened, and the most awful part of the representation is overlooked. Most of the commentators following some of the Jewish doctors, have pronounced this visitant of the rich man to be a mere personification of concupiscence; and so far the interpretation would be right, if under that emblematic form the principle of all evil be understood. This wayfaring person, indeed, is no other than the same of whom the Apostle speaks, as "walking about seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. v. 8); who is described by our Lord as "seeking rest and finding none" (Matt. xii. 48); and who says of himself, in that most ancient book, where his nature and operations are strongly exhibited, that he is "continually employed in going to and fro in the earth, and walking up and down in it." Job, i. 7. Such was the inmate admitted by David into his heart, and the immediate consequence of it was, that all the possessions and blessings with which Providence had favoured him,

ceased to afford him pleasure; and, like the first of the human family, nothing would gratify his appetite but what gratitude, and honour, and religion, expressly interdicted. Having brought the matter to this point, the parable very properly terminates; for all the crimes that followed were in the natural course of things, and began to operate the very moment that the rich man so imprudently suffered the wanderer, without any examination or resistance, to enter his dwelling.

When David saw that this was an exact representation of himself, he acknowledged the fidelity of the portraiture, and beheld, as in a mirror, that which an inspired writer so emphatically calls the "deceitfulness of sin." Heb. iii. 13. In the parable the king discovered what every one, who will compare it with his own temper and conduct, may also perceive—the inlet of all vice, and that which renders man accountable for the sins he is led to commit by the artifices of the tempter. The first act of folly is the credulity of indolence, or a presumptuous confidence in the integrity of our own hearts, by which channel the enemy of souls obtains the direction of the passions by various allurements, till the mind that was wont to start at the very appearance of moral evil, becomes so familiar with it in detail, as to practise at last all "uncleanness with greediness." Eph. iv. 19. Our primary duty and great interest then is to keep a constant watchfulness over the thoughts and senses, to prevent even lawful desires from becoming importunate, and the enjoyment of ease from being the bane of improvement. By this habitual diligence we shall acquire humility, which is the first security against danger, because experience will convince us, that whatever progress we may have made in virtue and knowledge, there yet remain many things to correct in the disposition, and many more to enrich and strengthen the mind. Let the language

of the penitent monarch then be our meditation and prayer; so shall we find an effectual shield to cover us from all the assaults of the adversary: "Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts; and in the secret, thou shalt make me to know wisdom."—*Ps. li. 6.*

MAY THE SIXTH.

THE REBELLION OF ABSALOM.

Samuel, xv. 4.—And Absalom said, Oh that I were made judge in the land, that every man which hath any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice.

THE first sin of which we have any memorial is rebellion, and it began in heaven, when the angels, who endeavoured to break the order established for their government, lost that principality and habitation wherein they were placed, and are now "reserved in chains of darkness unto the judgment of the great day." *Jude, 6.* More than this is not told us of that tremendous revolution, but it is connected with the history of moral evil, in which we have a particular concern; and it illustrates the next transgression, when man was seduced into disobedience by the flattering delusion of attaining a more glorious station than that assigned him by his Creator. Thus iniquity multiplies, and one intelligent agent injures another, by the impulse of opinion or the influence of example. No man can be wholly good or bad to himself alone; for every action, like a stone thrown into the stream, makes a circle which agitates all substances within its sphere, and drives those out of their direction that are most liable to be affected by any slight motion. The lapse of Adam brought:

murder and idolatry into the world ; and the fall of David was fatal to his own peace, and to the morals of his family. What Nathan denounced was accomplished to the fullest extent ; and the monarch saw, in the conduct of his children, the Divine judgment turning into instruments of correction the consequences of his own crimes. The atrocious deeds of his two sons were indeed foretold ; but that did not render them necessary, neither were they the result of any predetermination of the mind to evil. In His sight, with whom nothing is contingent, all things are clearly present, even ages before their proximate causes have an existence ; but this does not render man less free in his motives or accountable for his actions. Many dreadful scenes are predicted in Scripture, all of which have been literally fulfilled ; and among the rest, the wickedness of Absalom was plainly described in its most aggravating circumstances, and announced as a sentence of punishment to his unhappy father. But Absalom was not the less guilty on this account ; nor will the errors of those to whom we owe obedience by the laws of God, excuse any attempt to lessen the authority which they derive from a higher power. This unnatural and ungrateful son grounded his plea of usurpation on the alleged defects of government, and particularly the want of justice in the administration of affairs. He artfully applied his persuasive powers, which appear to have been of no mean order, to the prejudices of the people, by inflaming the passions of the discontented, and holding out fallacious promises to those who were unsuspecting of his bad designs. Having once gained the public attention, it was no great difficulty to secure it by making the weak and credulous believe that this accomplished prince was the only proper person upon whom they could rely for the removal of burdens, which, by the repetition of oratory, were magnified into enormous

grievances. This has been the ordinary method of raising popular commotions in all ages; and by listening to fraud and misrepresentation, have the simple and honest-hearted part of mankind too often suffered themselves to become the tools of unprincipled ambition, to their ultimate misery and the ruin of their country. That this imposition should have been so often practised, and still continue to be successful, may seem unaccountable; but the sagacious observations of a very grave writer, who saw deeply into human nature, will sufficiently explain the reason. "He that goeth about to persuade a multitude," saith the judicious Hooker, "that they are not so well governed as they ought to be, shall never want attentive and favourable hearers; because they know the manifold defects wherunto every kind of regiment is subject; but the secret lets and difficulties, which in public proceedings are innumerable and inevitable, they have not ordinarily the judgment to consider. And because such as openly reprove supposed disorders of state, are taken for principal friends to the common benefit of all, and for men that carry singular freedom of mind; under this fair and plausible colour, whatsoever they utter, passeth for good and current. That which wanteth in the weight of their speech, is supplied by the aptness of men's minds to accept and believe it. Whereas, on the other side, if we maintain things that are established, we have not only to strive with a number of heavy prejudices, deeply rooted in the hearts of men, who think that herein we serve the time, and speak in favour of the present state, because thereby we either hold or seek preferment; but also to bear such exceptions as minds so averted beforehand, usually take against that which they are loath should be poured into them*."

* Hooker's Ecclesiastical Polity, B. I. p. 70. ed. 1705.

Sedition displays the exercise of every talent but virtue; yet they who figure most conspicuously in the work of faction, are always obliged to clothe themselves in the garb of integrity, that their real character and objects may not be discovered. In this they do but imitate the author of all confusion, who is never more dangerous than when he appears as an angel of light. But as he is a devil in every condition, so his followers are no better than himself, when, under the mask of philanthropy, they labour to render men dissatisfied with the state in which God has placed them, and to refine away the force and obligation of his commandments. Absalom affected great zeal for the national welfare, and concern for those who complained of public abuses; by which means he gained over many to a conspiracy, of which they had no conception when they first hearkened to his fair speeches. But as if it had not been enough to practise the art of political deception, he must contrive to cheat the king his father by religious hypocrisy, and pretending a solemn vow which he had to discharge at Hebron. His object in obtaining the royal permission to visit this holy place, was to have it generally believed that he had the Divine call for what he was about to undertake; and thus impiety was made use of to promote parricide, and sacrilege to support rebellion. Here also this artful conspirator stands not alone; for whenever the crafty and the turbulent have thrown states into confusion, religion has never failed to be one of their most plausible pretences; as if that which was intended to preserve the harmony of the moral world could suspend any of the laws which God has revealed, or invert the order established by him through all his works. When Absalom left Jerusalem he was accompanied by two hundred men, who went in their simplicity, and were wholly ignorant of his wicked designs. In this manner all plots and confederacies

begin; for the evil-minded can never hope for success in their main scheme, without first deceiving the unwary and misleading the inconsiderate, by taking apparently the way of truth, till the confidence of familiarity enables them to make an open profession of their inclinations, as the spies dispersed through Israel blew the trumpet at the same time, proclaiming aloud, "Absalom reigneth in Hebron."

MAY THE SEVENTH.

AHITHOPHEL THE SUICIDE.

2 Samuel, xvii. 23.—*And when Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not followed, he saddled his ass, and arose and gat him home to his house, to his city, and put his household in order, and hanged himself, and died, and was buried in the sepulchre of his father.*

WORLDLY wisdom is a miserable security against temptation, and no support in the hour of trial and disappointment. The poor and the ignorant generally endure affliction with more fortitude, and pass through the vicissitudes of life with greater satisfaction, than those cunning men who have a strong confidence in their own powers, and who stand high in the estimation of mankind on account of their great sagacity and comprehensive intellect. But these very ingenious persons are much better qualified to lay down a rule of conduct for others than to practise it themselves; and they can pronounce judgment with singular acuteness upon all cases of conscience except their own. We have a remarkable instance of this in the history of Absalom's conspiracy, a principal actor in which was a man whose reputation for knowledge throughout Israel made his counsel

esteemed almost equal to the oracle of God. This Abithophel was the confidential adviser of David; and it is evident that he had the character of extraordinary piety, though how unjustly will fully appear from the narrative of his life and its disgraceful termination. When the rebellion began he was at Giloh, his native city, of which he seems to have been the governor, and where he presided at a public festival when the messengers of Absalom came to solicit his assistance. It is somewhat remarkable that a man so renowned for his superior understanding should have acceded to this proposal without taking some time for deliberation; but ambition is often as inattentive to consequences as it is regardless of the means by which its object may be attained. Abithophel knew that the usurper was already proclaimed at Hebron, and that a great part of Israel had either acknowledged him for king, or stood in that state of suspended expectation, which was more favourable to the daring adventurer than to the cause of loyalty. Sedition breaks all the ties of honour and affection; it sets the father against the son, and the son against the father, with bitter animosity; diffuses a spirit of ferocity through all ranks, and hardens even the female heart to scenes of blood. Following the violent impulse of lawless passion, they who lose their respect for government will soon go beyond the limitations of justice, till they become absolutely deaf to the calls of gratitude and humanity. This Abithophel had been highly distinguished by the reigning monarch, in whose patronage he enjoyed many important benefits and that splendid elevation which made him universally consulted as the wisest man in the kingdom. He had nothing to complain of in the behaviour of the king; his mind was neither irritated by disappointment, nor soured by the loss of favour; on the contrary, he still held his situation as chief counsellor, and by virtue of that distinction his

power was considerable throughout the realm.* But unmindful of the obligations which bound him to support the throne, this crafty statesman openly declared in favour of an unnatural revolt, influenced no doubt by the persuasion that he should obtain a complete ascendancy over the mind of an aspiring and active young prince, as his prime minister. David did not trust the entire management of affairs to any particular person; and this will account in a great measure for the treachery of this statesman, who wanted to have the direction of the kingdom without inspection or controul. Like too many politicians, with whom religion and morality are nothing more than the subserviencies of ambition, Ahithophel easily brought himself into the conviction that he was acting for the public service, when he was guided solely by selfish views, in transferring his allegiance from the legitimate sovereign to an unprincipled usurper. The voice of nature and conscience called Ahithophel to Jerusalem; but the invitation of Absalom presenting more alluring promises and brilliant prospects, drew this flexible courtier to Hebron.

The disposition of the man was soon fully developed in the shocking spectacle exhibited by his advice for the purpose of rendering the king odious in the opinion of all the people. To complete his iniquity, this pander of mischief and licentiousness proposed to cut off his royal master in the basest manner, before he should have time to muster sufficient force for his defence. But though the murderous counsel befitted the assembly and the occasion, it was over-ruled; and then Ahithophel perceiving that the cause in which he had so rashly embarked must inevitably fail, abandoned the confederacy and put an end to his life. Such was the shameful career of this celebrated person, who was so famed for his wisdom, that every one perplexed with doubt or involved in difficulty was glad to come to

him for direction. Yet we find that this penetrating genius, with all his skill, had not prudence and discernment enough to weigh and examine the nature of the business in which he engaged, before it was too late to extricate himself from the consequences of his folly. It may appear strange, that when Ahithophel quitted the council of Absalom he did not repair to the king, and endeavour to make all the atonement that lay in his power for the offences which he had committed. He was, no doubt, sorry for having fallen into so great an error, but his sorrow was not that which produceth repentance; it was nothing better than the angry resentment of wounded pride because his opinion was not followed, and the sharpness of despair resulting from the conviction that disgrace and ruin must be his portion. Unlike Judas, who threw away the wages of iniquity, confessed that he had betrayed the innocent blood, and then hanged himself; this traitor to his king and country was grieved to see his schemes prevented, and the righteous delivered from the snare of his devices. Ahithophel left the camp of the rebels because he had no longer any hopes of success; but his heart remained unchanged, and he would readily have been guilty of yet greater wickedness to gratify his lust of ambition. It was a humiliating stroke to be crossed in a council where he thought to have presided without opposition; but it was an additional mortification to perceive that the advice preferred to his own, tended directly to overturn all his plans and the flattering expectations which he had built upon this revolution. Depressed with a sense of dishonour, and seeing nothing before him but an increase of ignominy, this enlightened sage hastened "home to his city, put his household in order, and hanged himself, and died, and was buried in the sepulchre of his father." The history shows the danger of self-confidence, which leads men into

improper pursuits, and tempts them, for the sake of displaying their fancied superiority of judgment, to form sinful connexions, which end in shame and misery; exemplifying the apophthegm of wisdom, "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." Prov. xvi. 18.

MAY THE EIGHTH.

THE DEATH OF ABSALOM.

Samuel, xviii. 33.—*And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept; and as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom! my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!*

AMONG the highest acts of virtue is to be reckoned the forgiveness of injuries, and the brightest distinction of the religious temper is the gracious principle of love to our enemies. The conduct of David throughout the trying visitation, which proved an exact accomplishment of the prophetic judgment denounced against him for his transgression, was such as showed beyond all question the sincerity of his repentance and the integrity of his heart. When bitterly vilified and persecuted by Shimei, he not only refused to suffer any vengeance to be taken for the insult, but he even considered this additional treason as a part of the punishment which it was his duty to bear with patience. In reply to the zealous offer of Abishui, who thought it an act of necessary justice to destroy such an insolent offender, the king, who saw deeper into the matter, and applied it with efficacy to his spiritual improvement, expressed himself in this affecting language: "Behold, my son,

which came forth of my bowels, seeketh my life; how much more now may this Benjamite do it? Let him alone, and let him curse; for the Lord hath bidden him. It may be that the Lord will look on mine affliction, and the Lord will requite me good for his cursing this day." This was the true spirit of resignation to the Divine will, and a sanctified use of affliction in the subjugation of the passions, amidst undeserved reproach, and when resentment might not only have been indulged, but carried into prompt and effectual chastisement of the seditious offender, without being liable to the charge of severity. The motive of Shimei was revenge, and that of Absalom was ambition; but David knew how to distinguish between the actions of his persecutors and the dispensation of Eternal Wisdom by which they were turned into correctors of sin and the ministers of righteousness. It would conduce very much to our advantage if we were to regard all the opposition and unkindness which we experience in the same light; for, by so doing, the quick feeling of wrong would be alloyed with charity to our calumniators and benefit to ourselves. Though by this forbearance we should not succeed in softening their asperity and preventing their malice, we may be sure of this, at least, that the exercise of patience and the sentiment of pity will have the most satisfactory effect upon our own habit and disposition of mind. But if we can go farther than this, and receive the rebukes and contradictions of sinners, not merely with calm indifference, but as the messengers of Providence, commissioned for the purpose of mortifying our vain imaginations, bringing down the pride of our hearts, and convincing us of the errors into which we have fallen, then shall we know the meaning of the Psalmist, "Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice." Ps. li. 8.

When our crosses and trials thus become the instruments of self-examination, we shall see abundant cause to be grateful for them, and all our sufferings will be so many subjects of praise and thanksgiving. The evil which the malice of our enemies may devise and practise against us, will in this case be productive of good, by raising our thoughts above the world, and directing them to the Fountain of light and love, who draws us by these means to that communion where only we can lead peaceable and quiet lives in all godliness and honesty. David was exceedingly mild and forgiving, courteous and tender, amidst this sore affliction; but there is no part of his deportment under it more affecting than the anxious concern manifested by him for the safety of his unnatural child. When the army was about to march against the rebels, this was his only charge to the commanders, "Deal gently, for my sake, with the young man, even with Absalom;" and the first inquiry made by him after the battle was to the same effect, "Is the young man safe?" This amiable expression of sensibility and affection, which some, like Joab, may censure as weakness, originated in the purest and most exalted virtue. It was not merely the fond partiality of parental feeling, which made the king so anxious to preserve his son, but an awful apprehension of his dangerous state, should he happen to fall in unexpiated guilt. David was too wise to complain of the Divine decrees, or to expect that they should be suspended for his sake; but he well knew the characters of his generals, and that in a pretended zeal for his service they would not scruple to commit any barbarity. What he feared came to pass; for Absalom, in his flight, became the victim of his pride; and while he was entangled in the branches of an oak, the treacherous Joab smote him through the heart, without any pity for his defenceless condition or regard to the request and feelings of his

father. The manner in which David received the intelligence of his son's untimely fate, displayed the emotions of a soul refined from the consideration of personal injury, and alive only to the spiritual and eternal state of the youth, who in the act of inflicting it had been cut off without being allowed any time for repentance. The royal sufferer saw, in all this the even and unerring hand of justice ; and while he lamented the wretched catastrophe of his son, he could not but regard himself as the primary cause of the misery. This it was which made him utter the vehement wish that he had died rather than Absalom ; for his own penitence afforded him good grounds for confidence in the Divine mercy ; but the complicated crimes of the rebellious leader, and the awful circumstances of his death, bereaved the afflicted mind of its last refuge, the consolation of hope.

This affecting history abounds with instruction to the old and the young, parents and children ; teaching the one to be careful of the examples they set their offspring, and the others, to make a proper use, even of the things which they see amiss in those who should be, as far as human nature will permit, perfect patterns of imitation. Absalom, it is probable, would not have been encouraged to take the course he did, had he not known of his father's errors ; but this served only to aggravate his sin, and to heighten his condemnation. Let, therefore, young persons, if they would attain length of days and be a blessing to their posterity, attend diligently to the advice of the son of Sirach : " My son, help thy father in his age, and grieve him not as long as he liveth. And if his understanding fail, have patience with him, and despise him not when thou art in thy full strength. For the relieving of thy father shall not be forgotten ; and instead of sins it shall be added to build thee up. In the day of thine affliction

it shall be remembered; thy sins also shall melt away as the ice in fair warm weather." Eccclus. iii. 12—15.

MAY THE NINTH.

THE PIETY OF BARZILLAI.

Samuel, xix. 34, 35.—*And Barzillai said unto the king, How long have I to live, that I should go up with the king unto Jerusalem? I am this day fourscore years old; and can I discern between good and evil? can thy servant taste what I eat, or what I drink? can I hear any more the voice of singing men and singing women? wherefore then should thy servant be yet a burden unto my lord the king?*

FROM the melancholy history of a graceless youth and an evil counsellor, we turn to contemplate the beautiful picture of venerable piety, exhibiting all the amiable qualities that can adorn the human character in its present state of imperfection. Old age is naturally timid, cautious, and mistrustful; but when David fled from the conspiracy raised against him by his unnatural son, among the few that came and ministered to his wants was Barzillai, the Gileadite, who quitted his residence at Rogelim on purpose to furnish the king and his company with necessaries, when they lay encamped at Mahanaim. The historian describes this person as being a very great man; but when we read also that he was very aged, being fourscore years old, the wonder is, that one so rich and infirm should have acted with such extraordinary liberality and loyalty at a time when persons renowned for their rank and wisdom were eager to court the favour of the usurper, or remained,

out of fear, in a state of neutral suspense. While many forsook their king in his utmost need, and others, who had been fed by his bounty, took up arms against him, this excellent man appeared openly in behalf of the royal cause, and contributed largely of his substance to its support, though in so doing he exposed himself to the resentment of a powerful faction. Barzillai did not remain at home, and plead inability to wait upon his sovereign; but he arose and hastened to pay his respects in person, that the country might be influenced by his example. Many in his condition would have flattered themselves that they had done their duty in sending a present to David by the hands of a servant; but this good man took care to supply the adherents of the king with provisions daily, during their abode in that neighbourhood, which must have been attended with a very considerable expense. Barzillai had neither vanity nor interest to gratify by this display of zeal and generosity; on the contrary, the side which he espoused was weakest, and, according to human judgment, the insurrection had gained so much strength in the several tribes, that there appeared hardly any hope of its being suppressed without a long and sanguinary contest. The loyalty of this excellent man, therefore, had no other motive than the pure sense of duty, but, as he feared God, he honoured the king; and it was this religious principle which made him so readily sacrifice every consideration of ease and convenience for the sake of a good conscience. The splendour of royalty had no charms for Barzillai, who came to assist his sovereign when the vain and ambitious, the gay and the fickle, eagerly repaired to the standard of his competitor. "Many will intreat the favour of a prince, and every man is a friend to him that giveth gifts" (Prov. xix. 6); but this aged Israelite neither sought present honours, nor was desirous of future rewards. It was sufficient

for him to have fulfilled his duty, and the richest satisfaction he could experience was to see in the restoration of his prince the establishment of tranquillity. When, by the defeat of the rebellion, David was recalled to Jerusalem, the faithful Barzillai accompanied him part of the way, but no solicitation could prevail upon him to leave his dwelling for the vanities of the metropolis and the splendid gaiety of the palace. He was assiduous in his attendance while the king was in distress; but in the change of affairs which brought David again to his throne, the modest and faithful Gileadite considered his office as at an end, and therefore he was willing to retire into the bosom of domestic privacy, that he might prepare for his great change, and repose without disquietude by the side of his fathers. This conduct, reasonable as we may deem it, is that which few in similar circumstances would be disposed to imitate. The increase of years, instead of weaning men from the follies of the world, too generally rivets their minds to frivolous objects, and stimulates them to the pursuit of new pleasures. Barzillai, when invited to live with the king and to eat daily at his table, had judgment to discern that the acceptance of so dazzling an offer would neither add to his own happiness nor promote that of others. He might indeed be amused for a time, and be gratified by the kind attentions of those who had profited by his hospitality in the wilderness; but familiarity he knew would soon wear away these agreeable impressions, and yield him up a prey to the sullenness of dissatisfaction and the peevishness of neglect. While, therefore, he felt as he ought to do the distinction with which he was treated, he had fortitude to decline an invitation which, in vitiating his consequence, would have abridged his ease.

If this refusal of Barzillai indicated peculiar strength of mind, the reasons assigned by him were

no less honourable to his judgment and sensibility. Some persons, when they decline any proffered favour, do it in an ungracious manner, as if they conceived it inadequate to their deserts, and below their expectations; but this good man, though he was conscious of having rendered important services to the king, was not willing that it should appear he thought little of what was tendered him as a mark of favour, and therefore he stated plainly and fully the real grounds of his refusal. He was now at that time of life when the senses are enfeebled and the appetite is deadened; when the mental faculties want the acuteness of discernment and the power of discrimination; when, in the beautiful language of the Preacher, "fears are continually in the way; so that the grasshopper is a burden, and desire faileth, because man goeth to his long home." Eccles. xii. 5. Though Barzillai was not yet sunk into a state of absolute decrepitude, he felt the infirmities incidental to his age, and judiciously conceived that the fragment of life which remained would be much better employed in retirement than amidst the hurry and gaiety of a court. Unlike those persons who pursue the pleasures, the honours, and riches of this world, with the most eagerness, as the span of life contracts and the power of enjoyment lessens, this old disciple in the school of virtue was satisfied with having had an opportunity of showing his faithfulness to God by serving the king, and then withdrew to wait for his dismissal in the spirit of another venerable saint, who breathed forth this grateful song, when he embraced Him of whom David was a type: "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace according to thy word, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation." Luke, ii. 29, 30.

MAY THE TENTH.

THE SONG OF DAVID.

Samuel, xvii. 51.—*He is the tower of salvation for his king, and sheweth mercy to his anointed, unto David, and to his seed for evermore.*

THIS sublime ode was evidently composed when the wars of David were ended; but the character of the person celebrated in it is so majestic, and the scenes in which he was engaged are so uncommon, that it is plain a far greater monarch, and more triumphant victor, than the king of Israel is the object. Supposing that there are some particulars in which the distress and deliverance of David may be considered as fitly expressed in this song of thanksgiving; yet the language is such, that even the liberty of Eastern poetry will hardly be sufficient to warrant the assumption of it by any mortal conscious of his own infirmity. The trials of the Psalmist were no doubt many and severe; but whatever might be their magnitude, the picture of misery here drawn exceeds any thing that can be found in the history of this eminent person. No hyperbolism of style could have exhibited the difficulties which David endured under such shades of horror as prevail in this piece, nor would any elevation of piety have compared the mercy experienced by him to the convulsion of nature by the immediate interposition of the Divine glory. With all the allowance that can be made for the figurative beauty of impassioned eloquence, it is impossible to suppose that one acting under the influence of the Holy Spirit would affirm of himself that he was "rewarded for his righteousness, and recompensed according to the cleanness of his hands;" much less that "he had uniformly kept the

"ways of the Lord, and had not wickedly departed from his God." Now, so far was David from meriting this encomium, if indeed any man ever could be said to deserve it, that his latter troubles were confessedly the consequences of his deviation from the path of duty, by the aggravated sins of uncleanness and injustice. To him then this description cannot by any forced construction be applied; and it is equally clear that there is nothing in the Psalm which agrees with the subsequent part of his life. We are, therefore, compelled to look for another interpretation in the history of a Personage truly righteous, but suffering for iniquity, spotless in his heart and conduct, yet reduced to the lowest state of woe, attended with circumstances of extreme cruelty; persecuted even to death, and beyond it, but rising again by his own strength, and trampling upon the necks of all his enemies. The question, however, is put out of doubt by the authority of an Apostle, who on two different occasions alleges this psalm as descriptive of the Messiah; and an attentive examination of the poem itself will discover the force of this illustration, and the meaning of our Lord's own assertion; "All things must be fulfilled which are written in the Psalms concerning me." Luke, xxiv. 44. The very title, when properly considered, will prove a key to the sense, and a rule for the application. It is there said, "And David spake unto the Lord the words of this song, in the day that the Lord had delivered him out of the hand of all his enemies, and out of the hand of Saul." Such is the common reading, which would be greatly improved by a slight alteration, to render it more conformable to the original: "David spake the words of this song for, or concerning, Jehovah." This marks at once the glorious Person of whom the prophet is authorized to speak, and our minds are immediately raised above the Psalmist to contemplate one who infinitely ex-

ceeds all the sons of men. Even what follows, though it may seem to concern David only, will, upon a little consideration, be found to strengthen this expanded view of the composition. The singer was indeed delivered from the hands of all his enemies in a wonderful manner; but besides the strange inversion in the commemoration of his mercies, the truth is, that Saul had been dead many years, and his fall was the subject of a funeral poem, the beauties of which we have already noticed. It is, therefore, unaccountable how David should at so great a distance of time, and under very different circumstances, dwell upon injuries which he had received from his predecessor. But this difficulty will be entirely removed if the word Saul be taken, not as a proper name, but in its native import, and denoting what it strictly means, the state of the dead. Our translators have in other places more carefully regarded the signification of this very remarkable word, particularly in that parallel passage where the Psalmist lifts up his voice in praise for his restoration to light and life, "Great is thy mercy toward me, and thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell." Ps. lxxxvi. 13. Here the word which is made an appellative in the introduction to the prophetic song, is properly expressed by its correspondent term in our own language, as far as it conveys an idea of the invisible region, wherein the souls of men are reserved between death and the resurrection.

The title of the Psalm is therefore an explanation of its contents, and the theme is the same throughout, being nothing less than the incarnation of Jehovah for the redemption of man, and his rescue from the grave. Only one person since the foundation of the world could ever make this declaration, "All the judgments of God were before me; and as for his statutes, I did not depart from them. I was also upright before him, and have kept myself from mine

iniquity." But the word, "mine," in this place, is a superfoetation, both unnecessary and injurious to the sense; for though the Messiah did endure punishment and bear the accumulated transgressions of his people, he was himself without sin. The victory, and its consequences, described with such exulting sentiments and vehemence of style at the close of this interesting piece, will scarcely be found to have any suitable circumstances in the military achievements of David; and if such there were, the conclusion of the song destroys that application by this promise, which was never accomplished in the person of that monarch, nor any of his successors: "Therefore I will give thanks unto thee, O Lord, among the heathen, and I will sing praises unto thy name." Israel prospered greatly under this warlike king, and he considerably extended his dominions; but of him it never can be said that he brought the Gentiles from their idolatrous worship, or made them acquainted with the name and service of the true God. All this was left for another Conqueror, with whose establishment, after going through a series of unparalleled troubles and conflicts, the Psalm terminates, "He is the tower of salvation for his king; and sheweth mercy unto his anointed, unto David, and to his seed for evermore." By the king, in this place, as well as in every other part of prophetic Scripture, the Jewish doctors uniformly understand the Messiah; and in truth of no other than him, as Jehovah manifest in the flesh, could all these marvellous incidents be reported as matters either actually performed, or which would assuredly in the fullness of time be accomplished. This divine hymn then may be called the prophetic history of Christ, in his state of humiliation and descent to the world of spirits; his resurrection from the grave and triumphant ascension into heaven, where, at the head of the mediatorial kingdom, "he must reign

till all enemies are put under his feet. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto Him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all." 1 Cor. xv. 25—28.

MAY THE ELEVENTH.

THE PROPHECY OF DAVID.

2 Samuel, xxiii. 4.—*He shall be as the light of the morning when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain.*

THERE are three remarkable prophecies, all referring to the same object, and delivered under similar circumstances by the venerable persons who spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. The first of these is that of the patriarch, who on his deathbed marked out the future stations and conditions of his posterity, and fixed the spiritual blessing in the tribe of Judah. This promise was confirmed, and in its most essential points defined by the great legislator and leader of Israel, just before his removal from the scene of his labours to enjoy that rest which remaineth for the people of God. Lastly, the royal prophet, on drawing near to the period when he should be gathered to these illustrious founders of his nation, and other spirits of just men made perfect, delineated under the same Divine guidance, the glory of his reign who was destined to arise in his family for the completion of the holy oracles, and to bring in everlasting righteousness. This prophecy is entitled, "The last words of David," importing not merely that this was his final bequest to the church of God, but that it was "a prediction of what would

occur in the end of the age or the days of consolation." Such is the gloss which the most ancient of Jewish paraphrasts puts upon the introduction, and it is supported by the tenor of what follows, as will sufficiently appear from a consideration of the prophecy according to the original. The whole of the common translation is so very obscure, that the evangelic sense is lost, while the great Character of the piece is placed in such an inferior point of view as to be almost undistinguished. Even the literal version here attempted, void as it necessarily must be of all elegance, will not only express the prophetic style, but suggest to the mind of the reader those points which accurately determine the accomplishment of what is here predicted. "The word of David, the son of Jesse: his word who is exalted on high, the Psalmist of Israel, the Messiah of the God of Jacob. The Spirit of Jehovah speaketh by me; and his word is upon my tongue. Jehovah, the God of Israel, saith, the Rock of Israel declareth of me. The Just One reigneth among men; he ruleth in the fear of God. He is as the sun rising in the morning light, a morning of brightness without clouds; and as the rain that watereth the shooting plants of the earth. Verily, my house is not of such worth with God, that he should establish with me the everlasting covenant, made firm and secure; which is the whole of my salvation and my desire, even though it do not spring forth speedily. Yet the sons of Belial shall be cast away as thorns which will not be held with the hand; and though the man that toucheth them is filled with iron, and the staff of a spear; even they shall be consumed with fire in their place."

The first particular which calls for our notice in this description is the fact that the Just One here mentioned is the same with the Shiloh of Jacob; for in the prophetic benedictions of the patriarch, there

is only one to correspond with the reference made by David, and that is the conveyance of the sceptre to Judah. The advent of Messiah is compared to the appearance of the solar light in a clear horizon, indicating the season of tranquil expectation, after a long night of darkness; while the effects of his ascension are represented under the pleasing imagery of progressive fruitfulness, occasioned by the fertilizing showers of gentle rain penetrating the pores of the earth, and nourishing the tender herbage. But this great alteration in the moral world does not take place without violent opposition; and all that is done to promote universal righteousness, only serves to stir up the ferocious passions, and to excite the enmity, of the sons of Belial. So far from receiving with joy that which tends to gladden all nations, the persons to whom the blessed tidings originally come, remain deaf to the call, unimproved by the instruction, and even hardened by the mercy. That salvation which constituted the desire of the Psalmist, shall indeed spread to the utmost bounds of the earth in the illumination of mankind; but the change will be gradual, the result of labour, as well as of the Divine influence, and requiring the cultivation of the heart with the co-operation of grace. According to this prophetic representation, there are two classes of persons upon whom the opening of this dispensation, or the commencement of the righteous kingdom, is attended with different effects. The one, like the small and hidden seed in an arid soil, receive the word with honest hearts, and show it in their lives and conversations; while they who might have been expected, from their previous knowledge, to have profited most by the merciful visitation, resist it in the very first instance, and persecute with the utmost violence that Just One, in whose government the rest of the world shall rejoice, and all nations call him blessed. This conversion of the wilderness into a fruitful field, and

the awful contrast exhibited in the desolation of that sacred inclosure which was once the habitation of the Most High, form the frequent subjects of prophetic delineation; and both were remarkably verified in the reception of the Gospel by the Gentiles, after it had been rejected by the chosen people, who heard the Saviour, saw his miracles, and nailed him to the cross. Every particular in these last words of David had therefore its illustration in the history of redemption; for though the reign of the Just One must be ultimately glorious and universal, it began under circumstances more likely to prove its ruin than to promote its establishment. When this object of longing expectation came upon earth, instead of being welcomed with joy he was persecuted even at his birth, and pursued with unremitting virulence, till he became an offering for sin to bring in everlasting righteousness. He was literally filled with iron, which fixed him to the accursed tree; he was also pierced with the soldier's spear, when the effusion of blood and water ascertained his death beyond all doubt; and even the very circumstance of his being crowned with thorns had also a sacred meaning, as it showed the nature of his kingdom, which was not to consist of temporal power and visible splendour, but to be established in humiliation and suffering, amidst the treachery of pretended friends and the opposition of avowed enemies. The consequence of all this is here plainly predicted; for though the Gentiles had their share in the crucifixion of the Lord of Life, it was as instruments only, being compelled in a manner to participate in the offence by the obduracy of the Jews, who shortly afterwards experienced what David their king foresaw, and even the high priest, Caiaphas, himself foretold, the utter loss of their country and their entire extinction as a nation.

MAY THE TWELFTH.

THE ERROR OF DAVID.

2 Samuel, xxiv. 1.—*Again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them, to say, Go number Israel and Judah.*

WHEN we read that the Divine judgments have fallen upon a nation for the iniquity of the rulers, the people themselves must be considered as having been equally guilty. The sin of the one becomes the natural means of punishing the other; and both parties suffer in the general calamity, according to their respective stations and demerits. The acts of government may indeed multiply grievances, increase the spirit of discontent, and prepare the way for many calamitous events. But it would be well, amidst such pressures, to examine whether the aggregate of national crime is not hastening the dreaded crisis, and impelling the higher orders to the very measures which are the subjects of complaint. The misfortune is, that in all the fearful trials and visitations which shake the stability of civil communities, men look no further than to the proximate causes; and when they see pride and luxury, ambition and avarice, in the superior ranks, to these only do they ascribe public misfortune and private distress. But if every man would examine carefully his own views and temper, the manners of his associates, and the common sentiments of those with whom he is most familiar, his disposition to censure any one class more than another, might be corrected to his advantage. In extending his inquiries through the gradations of life, he would find that each member, by contributing his share to the national folly, becomes answerable for his proportion of the misery; whence it follows, that

if all neglect personal reformation, merely because every one considers his own habits as of little importance to the world, the consequence must be, that sooner or later all will have to lament what, by the contribution of individual virtue, might have been prevented.

The vanity of David led him to number Israel and Judah; or rather, according to the parallel place in the Book of Chronicles, Satan tempted the king to this sinful presumption. This may seem to have been a trivial offence; but when such a man as Joab could endeavour to dissuade his master from it, we are compelled to regard it in another light, and as a matter of deeper import than the mere gratification of idle curiosity. In all public concerns David had an unerring Director; but instead of applying to that Divine oracle for the guidance of his conduct, when moved to this extraordinary step, he instantly ordered his military officers to take the census of population throughout his dominions. It was now a time of general peace and prosperity; but instead of being humble under a sense of the great blessings which surrounded him and his people, the monarch became vain of his strength and confident in his security. The same evil spirit that misled Saul, was not backward to increase the pride of his successor, who appears to have said in his heart, "My power, and the might of mine hand, hath gotten me this wealth." Deut. viii. 17. But great as the error of David was, the primary source of the mischief did not even lie with him; for the narrative opens with this declaration, "Again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel." Now as the indignation of the Almighty was never provoked by any thing else but sin, it is evident that the transgression of the people was the source of their calamity. What their particular wickedness was, the history does not mention; but it was most probably the complicated mass of

infidelity and vice, the customary produce of ease and indulgence. In the folly of the monarch we may see reflected the depravity of the nation. He trusted to the arm of flesh by a strange forgetfulness that "there is nothing sured by the multitude of an host: and that a mighty man is not delivered by much strength," Ps. xxviii. 16. The season of tranquillity, which should have been devoted to useful arts and religious services, was employed in the parade of war; and thus the people were made to believe that the sovereign, who was regarded as the model of faith and piety, had more reliance upon their military prowess and numerical force, than upon the Divine protection. That ferocity which his example should have restrained, and the immorality which his authority should have reformed, became increased and extended by a proceeding calculated to flatter the vanity, and to inflame the worst passions, of his subjects. David had witnessed the instability of the Israelites in the rebellion of Absalom, and in another insurrection raised soon after by Sheba: circumstances which ought to have made the king cautious in his conduct towards such refractory spirits, yet sufficiently account for the judgment that came upon them. To that generation might have been applied the description which in a subsequent age the prophet gave of Jerusalem; "Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness, she said, I am rich, and in her daughters; neither did the strength of the hand of the poor and needy. And they were mighty, and committed abomination before me: therefore I took them away as I saw good," Ezek. xvi. 49, 50. From the fall of David we may learn the danger of trusting to our own powers in the time of temptation, and the necessity of guarding against vain thoughts in the season of prosperity. Let us then, if we would avoid his error, continually make use of his most

excellent prayer: "Keep back thy servant from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression." Ps. xix. 13.

MAY THE THIRTEENTH.

THE ACCESSION OF SOLOMON.

1 Kings, ii. 46.—*And the kingdom was established in the hand of Solomon.*

THE close of David's eventful life was marked by the rebellious attempt of his son Adonijah to gain possession of the crown, in which design he was supported by Joab, the captain of the host, and Abiathar, the high-priest. But as evil men usually deceive themselves by their policy, so it happened to these conspirators; for through an over-earnest endeavour to secure their object before the death of the aged monarch, they gave the alarm to those who were bound by interest and duty to defeat the project. It presents but a melancholy picture of the state of Israel at this period; when we see the chief minister of the sanctuary, and he too at an advanced age, so far profaning his venerable character as to espouse the cause of an unnatural usurpation. Joab acted like an ingrate towards the master who had treated him with uncommon liberality; but Abiathar added impiety to ambition, since he well knew that this assumption of the royal title was an infringement of that order which God had established for the government of the kingdom. These men, from their official situations and near connexion with the king, must also have known that the succession was fixed in Solomon; and the chief priest could not have been ignorant of the fact, that it had been so determined

by Divine appointment. Joab, indeed, might be actuated by his fears, and wish to secure a protector in the person of Adonijah; but it is difficult to account for the motives which influenced the conduct of Abiathar on this occasion. He seems indeed to have been given up to a judicial blindness of the understanding, and an infatuation of spirit, in opposing the elevation of the prince, who was not only the object of his father's choice; but expressly nominated by the decree of Heaven to fill the throne of Israel, and to build the temple of the Lord.

Here then we have the remarkable combination of the military and ecclesiastical power against the advancement of one whose rights were undeniable, and the glory of whose reign was the subject of prophetic description. The character of Adonijah was sufficiently marked by his conduct in this instance; and what the nation had to expect in the event of his success appeared in the language of Nathan, when he counselled the mother of Solomon to take immediate steps to save her own life and that of her son. This advice plainly shows what was intended by the confederates, who made so sure of their project as to celebrate it with a sacrificial feast and great rejoicing, at which most of the royal household, with the commander of the forces and the head of the priesthood, assisted. Thus religion was called in for the purpose of sanctifying wilful disobedience, and the institutions of the Most High were adopted to recommend an open infraction of his government. But "the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord; while the prayer of the upright is his delight" (Prov. xv. 8); and the very means used in this instance to set aside that order which God had settled, proved the ruin of the confederates, and hastened the accomplishment of what they dreaded. If then, in this opposition to the accession of Solomon, the malignity of the human heart is displayed in all the disagreeable

shades of base ingratitude and irreligious folly, our minds cannot fail to derive great consolation from the review of it, in beholding how steadily Divine Wisdom works its own purposes through the mass of contending passions, and amidst all the machinations which are contrived to defeat the gracious object. The contemplation of this history affords a comfortable illustration of the important truth, that no device or power can alter the designs of Providence, which are invariably going on; though the wicked triumph for a day, and seem in appearance to stand so strong as not to be moved. But their season of festivity is short, and all the strength and art made use of by them to secure their own power, as well as to depress the righteous, will ultimately be found instrumental to the promotion of that cause which they cunningly endeavoured to destroy. This was seen in the establishment of Solomon upon the throne of his father, when Adonijah and his associates were congratulating each other upon the effects of their courage and prudence in seizing the sovereign authority before the actual demise of the superseded monarch. Their mirth was quickly turned into consternation; and when it was told them that Solomon sat on the throne of the kingdom, fear ran through the traitorous assembly, "so that the guts rose up, and went every man his way."

While, however, we are engaged in considering this remarkable circumstance in the history of the chosen people, are not our thoughts turned to another Person, of whom it may be truly said, "Behold, a greater than Solomon is here!" Matt. xii. 42. The conspiracy against the exaltation and life of the young king of Israel, prefigured that which was formed with such fury to prevent the establishment of His throne, "who is over all, God blessed for ever." Rom. ix. 5. Prophecy had no other effect in either case than to provoke the malice and

increase the impiety of those who set themselves to overturn the Divine decrees. In both of these rebellions there was a conjunction of the civil and ecclesiastical jurisdictions, military force and religious authority, to support injustice and give a colour to sacrilege. But as in the instance of Solomon, when his enemies found that he was settled in the government, they were afraid and fled; so was it when Jesus attended and took his seat upon Zion, for soon after his persecutors perished in their rebellion, and became a bye-word among all nations. In like manner shall it be at the consummation of his kingdom; for when his faithful subjects are gathered into that state of peace and glory which remaineth for them under his righteous dominion, he will say of the unbelieving and impenitent, who resisted his grace, and opposed by wicked works the progress of his gospel; "Those, mine enemies, who would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me." Luke, xiv. 27.

MAY THE FOURTEENTH.

THE CHOICE OF SOLOMON.

- 1 Kings, iii. 9.—*Give thy servant an understanding heart, to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad; for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?*

EVERY adventurer in the great voyage of human life should at his outset consider the situation to which he is called, and the perils that lie before him, the duties he has to discharge, and the talents entrusted to his management. Though few are born to rank and affluence, yet all enjoy the native dignity of rational

agents, and possess powers, the application of which will either raise or depress them in the scale of moral and intellectual worth. Little as we may think of the matter, the truth is obvious, that no candidate for immortality enters upon the probationary state without receiving the Divine monition suited to his particular condition and prospects. To whom? this call is conveyed through the ordinary channel of education, or the speaking lesson of parental instruction and example; while others again are addressed in their occupations and favourite pursuits; but to all and each the voice cometh as it did unto Solomon, "Ask what I shall give thee." The question is general, and nothing is expressed, that the mind may be left to the free use of the reasoning faculty, and thus be accountable for its choice as well as for its conduct. In the peculiar circumstances of the young monarch, it was natural for him to have desired military renown, the enlargement of his territories, and the subjugation of his enemies. He had experienced the animosity of his brethren, and witnessed the disposition of the states to revolt in favour of one of them under a commander who had often led the armies of Israel to war with great success. The formidable conspiracy raised against his accession was indeed quickly discovered and promptly defeated; but many of those engaged in it remained, and Solomon was not unacquainted with the turbulent character of the people over whom he was placed, which made them at all times the instruments of revenge and the agents of sedition. Here then were such considerations as might seem to have warranted in the mind of an enterprising prince a wish to possess the most powerful means of securing his dominion and extending the glory of his crown. According to the most obvious estimate of worldly policy, this great object could only be attained by martial strength and the acquisition of wealth; or

at least by such a course of prosperous occurrences as should preserve respect abroad and tranquillity at home. All this no doubt was desirable, but there was something still more so, without which ease and grandeur, wealth and honour, would have been equally dangerous to the sovereign and the nation. The ardent and aspiring temper, mistaking consequences for causes, often loses the objects of its pursuit by not first seeking them in their true principles. Hence the thirst of glory ends in the shame of disappointment, and the anxiety for independence, by increasing our cares, multiplies our wants. Thus the restless spirit of man having made a wrong choice at the beginning, goes on and is never satisfied, missing by its impetuosity what might easily have been acquired by moderation; and becoming miserable in the possession of those things which, with the direction of prudence, would have been productive of felicity. But when the heart is established in the faith, it will be free from the fear of the world; and having confidence in the Divine wisdom and goodness, it can adopt the declaration of the Apostle, "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." Philipp. iv. 11. This happy disposition is not wrought all at once, but is the effect of study and habitual exercise; it begins with the love of truth, and is perfected by the practice of every religious duty. It is of essential importance then to sow the seeds of piety at an early age, that they may shoot forth vigorously, and be enabled to stand in the season of trial, when their influence will be required to discern between good and evil, amidst the deceptions of folly and the solicitations of appetite, the allurements of sin and the warnings of conscience. Solomon was very young when he ascended the throne; but he was already prepared for that high dignity by the vital spring of all virtuous action, the love of God, which guided him in his private de-

portment, and enabled him to desire judgment and righteousness for the public good. The blessing which he asked was more than doubled, because he sought it not for his own honour and emolument, but for the welfare of his people, and with a tender solicitude to fulfil his obligations towards them with equal sagacity and rectitude. When a person is animated by the wish to be useful rather than to shine in the world, and bends all his powers to that end, he finds a reward in the progress of his labours, and is crowned with honour, which he deserves and enjoys, because it is neither the fruit of design nor of flattery. Solomon prayed for qualifications which might render him a blessing to his subjects of all descriptions, and the consequence was, that his reputation for wisdom was spread through all the East. By asking in a right spirit for that which would keep him from an erroneous government, he obtained a vast accession of mental stores, and such abundance of wealth, through the extent of commerce, that his reign became glorious beyond all parallel in the history of ancient nations. This is a very encouraging lesson to young persons, as it shows the inestimable value of religion, and the proper method of applying it to all the great purposes of life. By resolving to make this the ruling motive and director in the choice and management of all their concerns, they will continually add to their faith virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; thus resembling, as far as it is possible to copy after Divine perfection, that blessed Person, who for our instruction went through the varieties of human existence, from infancy to manhood, and of whom it is recorded, that when a child "he increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man." Luke, ii. 52.

MAY THE FIFTEENTH.

THE GLORY OF THE TEMPLE.

1 Kings, viii. 10, 11.—*And it came to pass, when the priests were come out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the Lord; so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of the Lord.*

THAT any one place should be distinguished by the Divine favour more than another, is in the opinion of many an irrational notion, unworthy of man and injurious to the Deity, who fills immensity with his presence, and spreads his glory and goodness over all his works. But they who so judge, have more exalted conceptions of the Divine essence than a correct acquaintance with human nature. By taking an habitual view of universal extension, they lose sight of their own condition, and in contemplating the boundless dominion of God, they forget his particular relation to man. The mind of Solomon was to too full, acute and extensive as that of the philosopher, who pronounces illimitable space to be the only proper temple for the Divine honour; yet this great monarch, while he acknowledged that the heaven of heavens cannot contain Infinite Power and Majesty, was not restrained from building the most superb structure ever erected for religious purposes. He knew, that as the intellect of man is circumscribed, and his ideas mixed and localized; he falls into innumerable errors, and either superstitiously creates an imaginary divinity, or sinks into the atheistical stupidity of living as if there were none. Man can form no conception of abstract purity, and therefore he can never raise his thoughts to the comprehension of that perfection which distinguishes the Eternal

Mind. A being, then, endued with reason must be dealt with according to the extent of that faculty, from which no more should be expected than its means of information afford, nor ought more to be imposed upon it than its capacity can perform. The world indeed is framed and furnished for his use; but though every creature, great and small, presents convincing proofs of contrivance and benevolence, the spirit of admiration and gratitude is weakened, and rendered insensible by the recurrence of the same scenes and the frequency of the same benefits. What object can be so glorious as the sun ascending to his meridian splendour, or what spectacle can be equally gratifying with that of a rich and well-cultured domain, abounding in the stores of vegetation? yet these things are so common, that the sight of them makes no religious impression upon the mind, where the sentiment of piety did not prevail before. When that is the case, all the varieties of nature will be converted into lessons of Divine instruction, and every occurrence in the journey of life is an advancement in the science of moral improvement. But even here the most serious and best informed understanding will be affected by many painful considerations, arising from reflection upon past follies and the apprehension of future ills, the sense of present imbecility, and the dread of approaching vacuity. There must then be some positive institutions for the edification of man, to preserve the remembrance of his obligations, to keep him in the path of duty, and to animate him with the prospect of higher attainments in virtue and happiness. Even in the state of primeval innocence there was a settled holy place, where man held an intimate communion with his Maker; and after the fall, the establishment of an altar was necessary to make him humble and to keep him from despair. What was requisite in the beginning of time and the origin of

human depravity, must be equally so in the progress of society and the multiplication of moral evils. Though nature may afford ample means of instruction, it can neither yield the consolation of hope nor give any assurance of pardon. The sphere of knowledge is bounded within the narrow limits of the present hour; and while the mind stretches to the verge of existence, in the anticipation of continued enjoyment and activity, it draws back with fear and anxiety from the recollection of the years of folly that are past. Such being our situation, it is obvious that unless the Source of all bliss had made a communication of his will to us, and fixed the means of our holding an intercourse with him, we must have remained in utter darkness with respect to the Divine intentions and our future allotment. Particular times and places, then, though they are of little or no moment to the Deity, are of great importance to the welfare of his finite and erring creatures, who continually want the comfort of forgiveness and the assistance of grace. When the king of Israel had completed his magnificent fabric, he celebrated the dedication of it with great solemnity; and on that occasion he delivered a prayer, in which he said, "But will God indeed dwell on the earth?" The question surely is of vast import; but it did not prevent the monarch from praying, that whenever the people assembled in that place, their petitions might be answered in the pardon of their sins. If they worshipped towards the temple, it was a sign of their sincerity; but if they treated the sanctuary with indifference, and regarded all places alike, a clearer proof could not be given that they wanted both faith and repentance.

The question of Solomon was no rapturous exclamation; it was the sentiment of gratitude for the mercy then immediately before him, and the declaration of his faith in One much greater, to be accomplished in the fullness of time. Solomon was aware that the

Divine nature could not be comprehended by any finite capacity; but he knew that the special manifestation of this glory, under a visible form, had been vouchsafed to the faithful at sundry times and in divers manners. He had the same object now in view that guided the fathers through the wilderness, and which was always acknowledged to be the presence of Jehovah, under the two-fold appearance of cloud and fire. This question, therefore, had a relation to some great but future blessing, the assurance of which was now given by the display of the Shechinah, or the well-known symbol of glory throughout the Holy of Holies. Here was an evidence that the favour of God still rested upon his chosen inheritance; and it was a pledge, also, that he would fulfill his word by actually dwelling upon the earth. To us who have the demonstration of the Spirit, that "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself," the question of the wise and pious monarch will be abundantly clear and encouraging, because the answer is supplied by the fact, that "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth." John, i. 14.

MAY THE SIXTEENTH.

THE QUEEN OF SHEBA.

1 Kings, x. 1.—*And when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon, concerning the name of the Lord, she came to prove him with hard questions.*

KNOWLEDGE is desirable, even in circumstances where man has little to hope from the possession of it; and hence he often seeks it with the greatest

avidity when the pursuit is attended with difficulty, and the attainment affords only a momentary gratification. But this is the condition of our nature since the first of the human family broke the prescribed limits of contented obedience, to become acquainted with a science which could only distract the mind, and render it unfit for the great purposes of life. Paradise was not lost by the wish for mental improvement; nor did the original parents of our race entail the malediction of pain and labour upon their posterity, through the endeavour to increase the stores of rational enjoyment. Their error lay in aspiring to a higher station than that in which God had placed them, and in aiming to know what he graciously kept from them. But what was sinful in them, as proceeding from an inordinate ambition to obtain that which had been expressly prohibited, becomes in some measure our privilege and duty. What was forfeited by them we must acquire in the way that Infinite Wisdom hath appointed, and the promise of which became an inexhaustible source of consolation and hope to the first transgressors. They rashly thought to enlarge their intellectual powers by a departure from the Divine precept; and we must seek for light and life in the revealed word. In soaring to the rank of angels they sunk to the vassalage of sin, from which abject state we must strive for deliverance, through the redemption wrought out by the sacrifice of atonement. Reconciliation to God in the forgiveness of all iniquity was declared at an early period, and became the subject of various communications to the patriarchs, till the manner of it was figured and bodied, as it were, to the eye of the faithful worshipper in the services of the tabernacle. The incommunicable name of Jehovah expressed this great truth, by designating the Divine Person who bore it, as the Saviour that was to come. This sacred word did indeed convey to the Church

of old the comfortable assurance that the God in whom she put her trust was not only the Creator of all things, but her Redeemer and Sanctifier. The term is relative, and marks these several conditions of being; "I am he who was, and is, and is to come;" by which must be understood somewhat besides simple eternity and self-existence. The Almighty is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever; but when this appellative was assumed by him, it was intended for a special purpose, and to indicate his connexion with man in three distinct characters and dispensations. We are not, therefore, to wonder that the Jews should always have considered this name of the Lord as of tremendous import, though, according to their explications and the common etymologies, it is difficult to conceive how the word could ever have been supposed to involve any mystery. But in truth it comprehends the whole system of revealed religion, and is significant of the economy of grace in the salvation of man. This ineffable name carries us back to that epoch when the worlds were created by the Divine Word, who is "before all things, and by whom all things consist." Col. i. 17. It brings us from the formation of man, and the promise of a Redeemer, through the several preparations for the great work of love, till the meaning of the name was explained by the angelical interpreter: "Thou shalt call his name JESUS; for he shall save his people from their sins." Matt. i. 21. When, therefore, we read that the queen of the South came to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and that this wisdom appertained to the name of the Lord, it is obvious that the motive which impelled this extraordinary woman to undertake a journey from the Arabian coast to Jerusalem, was purely religious, that she might learn more perfectly the things belonging to the promised salvation. The name of the Lord is here put for the

whole mystery of faith ; and this, of course, was that which she came to learn, and in the knowledge of which she made so great a proficiency as to have gained the praise of him who was wisdom itself. In contrasting the conduct of this illustrious female with that of the unbelieving generation, among whom the Messiah appeared, the fullest attestation was given to her piety ; and upon the same high authority we are enabled to ascertain what the information was which she visited Jerusalem to acquire. It is said, that, hearing the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the Lord, she came to prove him with hard questions, by which very remarkable phrase we must understand something more than a mere desire to try his skill and prove the extent of his judgment in matters of curious speculation.

The result of the interview will satisfy us as to the nature of her inquiries ; for we are told that she had no more spirit left within her, and that she blessed the Lord God who had made Solomon king of Israel to do judgment and justice. From this it seems clear that she was not a proselyte before her arrival, but that the doctrine which she heard from the mouth of the king overcame all her prejudices, removed her scruples, and filled her soul with joy in believing. The hard questions which she put to this preacher of righteousness, for so at this time Solomon truly was, were those difficulties which press upon the inquisitive mind in its search after truth ; and especially the most important of all concerns : the means of obtaining that divine life without which the riches, splendour, and wisdom of this world are nothing better than the appendages of folly and the amusements of misery. Our divine Master hath set the example of this woman before us for our imitation, by showing what spirit is necessary to the attainment of that knowledge which he came to impart. The queen of Sheba left a country abounding with worldly good,

and ventured upon a long and perilous journey, to gain some insight into the deep things of God; and while she heard the instructor with attention, she proved him by stating her perplexities and doubts with candour and humility. In like manner must we leave all other pursuits and dependencies to visit the court of the great King, who is exalted to administer justice and judgment; and when we have laid before him our wants and fears, in an entire submission to his counsel, we shall experience the fullness of that promise, "They also that erred in spirit shall come to understanding, and they that murmured shall learn doctrine." Isaiah, xxix. 24.

MAY THE SEVENTEENTH.

THE IDOLATRY OF SOLOMON.

1 Kings, xi. 4.—*It came to pass when Solomon was old, his wives turned away his heart after other gods; and his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father.*

It is a mortifying conclusion, which the most enlightened of earthly monarchs draws from his profound researches into the secrets of nature and intimate acquaintance with the policies of mankind, that "in much wisdom is much grief; and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow." Eccles. i. 18. But it must have been still more painful to reflect, that, after all his ingenuity and observation, he had not been able to preserve his reputation uncontaminated, nor his conscience void of offence. That a man so wonderfully endued with divine and human knowledge, should have fallen into the grossest errors, both of faith and practice, affords an incontestible evidence of the weakness of reason, and its utter in-

sufficiency to withstand temptation. So capacious was the mind of this extraordinary king, that in wisdom he excelled all the children of the East, and even Egypt, a country proverbially famous among the ancient nations as the seat of science. Great, indeed, must have been his renown, and uncommon the display of his intellectual powers, when the report could attract "all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon from all kings of the earth, which had heard of his wisdom." 1 Kings, iv. 34. The genius and popularity of the king of Israel had correspondent effects upon his people; who were greatly enriched by his administration; but the vast increase of wealth, the produce of commerce and an extensive territory, brought an influx of strangers into the country, which occasioned a change of manners, and corruption of principles. The magnificence of Solomon, and his exertions to aggrandize his dominions by foreign trade, are not mentioned as errors of government; on the contrary, they form the theme of praise in the history, and they were also the subject of particular exultation in that prophetic psalm, which describes, under the glory of this reign, that of the Messiah. But while Solomon was employed in acquiring and diffusing knowledge, exercising the talents of his subjects, and cultivating the friendship of other nations, he suffered a profusion of luxury to be introduced into his kingdom; and in his own court he set an evil example, not merely by the splendour of his appearance, but by adopting the practices of the surrounding states. The transition is easy from an esteem for persons in things indifferent, to an association with them in those which are sinful. This wise monarch, whom all the world courted and admired, yielded to unlawful pleasures and infidelity by degrees. First he became enamoured with strange women, and having once departed from the statutes which it was his duty to have observed and enforced, he soon carried his indulgence

to excess, the consequence of which was, that, as the resolution of virtue weakened, the sentiments of piety decayed, and he who knew what was right, continued enthralled in vicious connexions till they robbed him of his faith as well as his honour. According to his own confession, which is an excellent comment upon this history, it appears that Solomon countenanced the superstitious customs of the heathen, not out of any belief in them, but merely that he might seek out the reason of things, and know, or thoroughly understand, "the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and madness." Eccles. vii. 25. His thirst of information was so great, that the range of sanctified wisdom could not bound his desires; and after becoming the slave of his passions, he flattered himself that the study of evil things would be at least harmless if not profitable to his mind.

This delusion has been very common since the time of Solomon; and many have gone into foolish courses with the same vicious curiosity and vain confidence that he did, though it is to be feared few have discovered equal proofs of deep contrition and sincere repentance. Let it be our care then, if we would avoid falling into his errors, to shun that familiarity with deceivers, which, in spite of all our boasted fortitude and previous knowledge, must end in shame and confusion. "He that toucheth pitch shall be defiled therewith" (Eccles. xiii. 1); and when any one in the pride of his heart thinks himself safe in the society of sinners, because he is aware of their devices, he stands most in danger of being overthrown by a snare against which he had made no preparation. The surest way to preserve our integrity and peace of mind, is by observing a constant watchfulness over our thoughts, to prevent the intrusion of those desires which are the inlets of all corruption in faith and manners. "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: fear God, and keep his commandments; let

this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." Eccles. xii. 13, 14.

MAY THE EIGHTEENTH.

THE SCHISM OF JEROBOAM.

1 Kings, xii. 32.—*And Jeroboam ordained a feast in the eighth month, in the fifteenth day of the month, like unto the feast that is in Judah; and he offered upon the altar, (so did he in Bethel), sacrificing unto the calves that he had made; and he placed in Bethel the priests of the high places which he had made.*

SEDUCERS have a natural aversion to truth, because it detects their errors; and the wicked dread religion, because it condemns their unrighteous deeds, and renders their power insecure. Jeroboam, having rebelled against his sovereign, and drawn aside ten of the tribes from the house of David, was afraid that if they continued to worship the true God, and to observe his ordinances at Jerusalem, they would return to their duty, and continue for the future equally faithful to the altar and the throne. To prevent this, he had recourse to the expedient of devising a separation; and for that purpose he began by persuading the people that it was troublesome for them to attend the regular feast in Judah. This plea for reform, grounded on the plausible pretence that the established religion was a yoke of burthensome ceremonies, had the desired effect, and easily prepared the credulous Israelites to believe that what followed was intended for their benefit, when in fact it was no more than a piece of craft to keep them in ignorance and

subjection. Jeroboam took counsel, but with whom we are not directly told, though it was doubtless with the leaders of the revolt, who thought that sacrilege and idolatry would prove the surest way to maintain the usurpation which they had promoted. But as the violent and unprincipled never project any good design themselves, so they cannot endure any thing of that tendency in others, lest their own schemes should be injured by its success. Hence we find, that this assembly of evil counsellors, having for their primary object the security of that power which was obtained by rebellion, contrived to cheat the people out of their religion. Two golden calves in imitation of the Egyptian Apis were set up, one at Dan, and the other at Bethel, with a pompous ritual, and an established priesthood, suited to the infamous service. But the ceremonial instituted in honour of these idols, and the stated periods appropriated to the national observance of it, were artfully made to correspond with the sacrificial rites and festal days which all the tribes had hitherto been accustomed to celebrate together as one congregation at Jerusalem. Thus schism and impiety completed what was begun by sedition; and the followers of Jeroboam, after rejecting their king, were, without much difficulty, brought to renounce their God also. This was in the natural course of things; for when men have suffered themselves to become the agents of fraud and ambition, they will very readily adopt such an accommodating scheme of morality and religion as shall furnish an apology for their offence, and confirm them in the practice of it. A stronger testimony to the excellence of revelation could hardly be given than that afforded by the fears of Jeroboam, which led him to establish idolatry in opposition to the faith and worship of the true God. He said in his heart; "Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David; if this people go up to sacrifice in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, then shall the

heart of this people turn again unto their Lord." Nothing but the conviction that his proceedings against Rehoboam were contrary to the law of God could have created these apprehensions; for if the division of the kingdom had been just on his part, the adherence of the Israelites to the ancient service was the surest pledge of their obedience. But conscience told the usurper that success does not sanctify a cause, and that the permissive will of Providence is no justification of those who are the instruments of scourging a sinful people. The prophet had indeed told him that he should obtain the rule over the ten tribes, on account of that gross defection of which Solomon was guilty; but this prediction was no warrant for the rebellion of Israel, and the usurpation of Jeroboam. Their corrupt principles and vicious practices were indeed turned, by a very common process, into the means of fulfilling the Divine decree, and of executing the judgments which were foretold; but the reasons of His government, who makes the wicked his ministers of punishment, are very different from their motives in the infliction of vengeance. That the conduct of Israel in this separation was rebellious against God as well as against Rehoboam, is evident from the iniquity which followed the breach of the union, and the misery which they entailed upon themselves; for in the whole number of kings set up by them not one was good, and at last the ten refractory tribes were utterly lost in the captivity: none of the seed of Jacob being restored, but the two tribes who remained true to their God and their king. In civil and religious obedience we shall always enjoy the best security of our privileges; but if we allow deceivers to impose upon us by doctrines which cannot be maintained without sophistry, and a perversion of the positive precepts and ordinances of the Divine institution, that will be verified in us which was said of some in the early age of the church, who made religious freedom the

cloke of licentiousness: " While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption . for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage." 2 Peter, ii. 19,

MAY THE NINETEENTH.

THE DISOBEDIENT PROPHET.

1. Kings, xiii. 18.—*But he lyed unto him.*

FRAUD was the introduction of human misery, and the credulity of our first parents rendered the conquest easy. They were deceived into a belief that the forbidden tree was the means of making them wise ; and in every age men have been drawn into error by a similar delusion. The father of mischief contrives to give his deceptions the appearance of truth, and he enslaves the mind with the promise of greater light and freedom. The Israelites, after renouncing their legitimate sovereign, and setting up an independent kingdom, were soon persuaded to change their religion and to fall down before the calves of Jeroboam. Bethel, from being the house of God, became the temple of idols : and that place which was once distinguished by the vision of angels was made the seat of apostacy. The altar erected in opposition to that of Jerusalem, was placed on the spot which had been consecrated by Jacob, that the people might regard it with the greater reverence, and join in the idolatrous ceremonies there performed without compunction. While these abominations were practised in the presence of Jeroboam, an old prophet resided at Bethel ; but neither he nor his sons had so much zeal for the Divine honour, as to warn their countrymen from the wicked courses in which they were engaged. So deplorable was the condition of Israel in this time of

schism and rebellion, that there was neither a faithful prophet nor a true priest to be found among them; which confirmed and illustrated the observation of the wise man, "They who leave the paths of uprightness walk in the ways of darkness." Prov. ii. 13. Yet the Lord would not leave himself without a witness, nor suffer this sinful nation to continue in an undisturbed state of disobedience and impiety. In the midst of a public festival, when Jeroboam was engaged in offering sacrifice, a man of God came from Judah, and denounced the Divine judgments against the altar, and all who should be employed in its service. This boldness of the prophet astonished the tyrant, who stretched forth his hand, and commanded the intruder to be seized by the guards; but in the act Jeroboam was smitten with a supernatural stroke, and at the same time the altar was overturned in a miraculous manner, agreeable to what had been just declared by the minister of God. Convinced, though not converted, by these wonders, Jeroboam entreated the prayers of the prophet in his behalf, and, on the recovery of his limb, he had gratitude enough to invite him to his house. But the word of the Lord was peremptory upon the messenger, that he should give no countenance to idolatry by eating or drinking with those who had broken their covenant with the Almighty. Feasting upon sacrifices was an essential part of the religious service, and they who partook of what was provided on these occasions showed thereby a respect for the object of worship. The injunction, therefore, which was laid upon the prophet of Judah to abstain from eating bread and drinking water in that place, had a reference to this custom, and was designed to prevent any evil consequence that might be the result of any friendly association with men who had abandoned the faith of their ancestors. It was not fitting that the servant of God who came upon such a mission should appear to

give any encouragement to those who, for the sake of gratifying their lust of change, had forsaken the statutes which were calculated to render them a great and happy people, and who had abandoned the temple of their God, in compliance with the wishes of an apostate ruler created by themselves. But though the prophet of Judah had sufficient fortitude to resist the invitation of the king, he was not proof against the glozing artifices of a hoary seducer. The devil is never so dangerous as when he is clothed in the garb of holiness, and the believer ought then to be most on his guard when he falls into the company of those who, with the semblance of purity, would abridge the rule of faith, and give a latitude to that of manners. When the old prophet of Bethel was informed of what had happened at court, he could shake off his indolence, to go upon the business of temptation, though, amidst all this national corruption, he had never once discharged his duty. Having neglected his office, he was grieved to find that another had been more faithful; and in the usual spirit of dishonest servants, he was resolved to make the prophet of Judah as bad as himself. For this purpose he saddled his ass, and, by pretending a Divine message, succeeded in imposing upon the unwary stranger, who, after behaving as became his character, in the presence of Jeroboam and his courtiers, fell into the snare of this sanctimonious deceiver, and perished miserably for his folly. He ought to have known, that of two opposite precepts, one only could be right; and as he was assured of the Divine origin of the command which he had received, it was enough to make him reject that brought by a man with whom he was not acquainted. There were many circumstances in the case which should have made him fixed in his refusal, the principal of which were these, that the prophet of Bethel lived in a place overrun with abominations countenanced by his silence, if not by his advice and assistance. But

if this was not sufficient to awaken suspicion, the language of the man carried its own confutation with it; for he pretended to have been sent by an angel, when the original interdict came directly from the word of God, who alone could alter the direction he had given. Instead of requiring a sign as the proof of his authority, which was the obvious course to have been adopted, the prophet, without making any inquiry, believed the lie that was told him in the name of the Lord; for which he had the mortification of being rebuked by the mouth of the tempter, who, in this particular, became a true seer by pronouncing the judgment which was speedily executed. The melancholy fate of this man, who so quickly fell into the snare of the destroyer, after having borne his testimony to the truth with fidelity, is a caution to us not to be cheated out of our principles and integrity by men who affect peculiar sanctity, remembering who hath said, "There shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders, inasmuch, that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect." Matt. xxiv. 24.

MAY THE TWENTIETH.

THE WIDOW OF ZAREPHATH.

1 Kings, xvii. 24.—*And the woman said to Elijah, Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth.*

THE preceding narrative exhibited the affecting picture of an inspired messenger of God, who began well and discharged his mission faithfully in the presence of a powerful monarch, his priests and courtiers; but afterwards suffered himself to be deceived

by an aged traitor of his own profession. Our attention is now called to an opposite character, whose history shows the line of duty which every believer must pursue in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in private life and in retirement from the world, as well as on the great stage of public employment, surrounded with a variety of cares, and exposed continually to new temptations. When Elijah the Tishbite, in obedience to the Divine command, denounced to the most wicked of all the kings of Israel, a famine that should continue above three years, he was ordered to take up his abode in a desert place, by the side of a brook, and there to depend for his daily sustenance upon the bounty of Providence. It was a trying injunction; but the prophet complied without murmuring, and hastened to the retreat assigned him, without consulting flesh and blood about the comforts he must renounce, and the dangers to which he would be exposed. In this probationary state did the Almighty think proper to place his chosen minister, that he might acquire the knowledge and self-command necessary for the great service to which he was destined. All the ancient worthies, to whom was given a large portion of the divine Spirit, were prepared in solitude for the public service; and the Saviour, prefigured by them, did in like manner live in obscurity many years before he came forth to preach the Gospel of the kingdom. The utility of talents can only be ascertained by their application to the various purposes of life; but it is in privacy that the mind acquires the habit of attention and steadiness of judgment so necessary to the discovery of truth and improvement in virtue. Equally just and elegant is the observation of an excellent writer upon this subject: "In morality, as in husbandry, the preparation of the soil is a great step towards the production of a plentiful harvest. If carnal desires are dead in us, all things belonging to the Spirit will live and grow

in us. If the affections are disengaged from things on earth, the difficulty of the work is over; they will readily and eagerly lay hold on things above, when proposed to them. If the snare of concupiscence be broken, and the soul is delivered out of it, she will presently fly away, on the wings of faith and charity, towards heaven. They who have duly practised mortification in the school of retirement, will, at their appearance in the world, afford it the brightest examples of every thing that is honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report.* When Elijah was completely brought under the Divine government, and had learnt perfect submission to the word of God, the miraculous fountain dried up, and he was directed to enter again into the society of mankind. But though it was a time of general scarcity, the prophet received instructions to take a long journey as far as Zarephath or Sarepta, a maritime city belonging to the Sidonians. The best of interpreters have adduced this circumstance as an evidence that the call of the Gentiles was in the intention of Divine Wisdom from the beginning; for, as he observes, there were many widows at this period in Israel, to whom the man of God might have been sent; but passing over all these, he was directed to visit this city of Canaan, and to become an inmate in the house of a desolate stranger. With the explication thus afforded by our blessed Lord, we shall find no difficulty in comprehending the reason why Elijah was enjoined to remain for such a length of time in solitude, and then conducted, in the power of the Spirit, to display the wonderful grace of God among those who were considered as outcasts by the commonwealth of Israel. The same teaching which opened to the prophet the full extent of the mystery of grace, prepared the heart of this

* Bishop Horne's *Considerations on John the Baptist*, p. 55, octavo edition.

poor woman, like that of the Syrophœnician, in the fullness of days, for its reception. This is plain from the compellation which she used in her reply to the request of the wayfaring man, that she would bring a morsel of bread with the water that she was going to fetch him : " As Jehovah, thy God, liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse : and behold I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it and die." That she behaved courteously when pressed to share her last mouthful with one who was an utter stranger to her, is not, perhaps, extraordinary, for affliction begets sympathy ; but it may well excite surprise, that a person of her country and condition should speak in terms of pious resignation and the strong language of faith in the true God. Though reduced to the utmost state of penury, she had a feeling and charitable heart, was mild in her behaviour, willing to render every good office that lay in her power to those who were miserable like herself ; and even when required to make a cake for the poor traveller out of her last handful of meal, she murmured not, but believed the word of the Lord by his mouth. Here, then, was a wretched Canaanite in the lowest state of human woe, who, regardless of her own pressing necessities, hastened to relieve the thirsty traveller, treated, what some would have considered, a very unnatural demand with gentleness, and on its being repeated with a promise very unlikely to be performed, obeyed, and was saved in the dreadful calamity which spread desolation over the land. But the trial of faith, and the reward of it, extended yet farther, for her benefit and our instruction. The death of her son was the extinction of hope to this widowed mother ; yet the overflowing of her agonized spirit did not produce any bitter complaint against the man of God as the cause of her misfortune. On the contrary, she spoke of it as the

visitation of her sin, and trembled under the stroke, in an apprehension that it was the mark of the Divine displeasure. Such was the gracious proof which this alien from the family of Israel gave of her penitence and the sincerity of her conversion, even when the hand of God was heavy upon her wounded spirit. But the confession which she made on receiving her child, fully expressed how greatly she had profited by the teaching of the minister of righteousness. "Now," said she, "by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of Jehovah speaking by thy mouth is truth."

In the broad display of the Gospel, when the Divine Word, in whom this woman believed, came personally upon earth, and brought life and immortality to light, the people would not be persuaded to accept of him as their Lord, though they witnessed his power over death and the grave. They rejected him, as Israel of old persecuted this great prophet; while the Gentiles readily embraced the offer of salvation, and gladly submitted to the dominion of the Messiah. Thus the church began to be gathered out of all lands, and the nations that had wandered long in darkness, rejoiced in the brightness of His rising, who had proclaimed the beneficial effects of his kingdom ages before, in this cheering address to the Gentile world; "Fear not, for thou shalt not be ashamed: neither be thou confounded, for thou shalt not be put to shame; for thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more." Is. liv. 4.

MAY THE TWENTY-FIRST.

THE FAITH OF ELIJAH.

1 Kings, xviii. 21.—*How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him.*

IN this mild, but authoritative manner, did the prophet reprove Israel for that fluctuating disposition which would make an alliance between God and mammon, acknowledge the truth and serve idols. A general assembly had been called together by Ahab to witness an extraordinary contest which was to decide whether the worship substituted by that monarch, and embraced by the people out of complaisance, was preferable to that of their ancestors. On this occasion the king seems to have had great confidence in the supernatural power of his priests, four hundred and fifty of whom were opposed to the single person of Elijah. But it may be wondered at, that these men should have so readily accepted the challenge, knowing, as they must, that the object of their devotions had never supported his credit by miracles. They might, indeed, rely much upon their craft and more upon their numbers, aided as they were by the countenance of the whole court, with the king and queen at their head. A refusal of the offer would have indicated weakness, and confessed imposture; which among an enraged and unsettled people might have produced fatal consequences to the deceivers and their friends. Still the advantages on their side were numerous and formidable, as they had the royal favour to support them, and only one man to fear, who was indeed endued with wonderful powers; but being dreaded by the nation and hated by the sovereign, they had little to apprehend from his superior talents. When we take a view of this remarkable scene, the

faith of Elijah fills the mind with astonishment, standing alone as he did in a circle of armed warriors ready to obey the mandate of their bigoted chief, who was influenced by an artful woman and an infuriated priesthood. But the prophet, who was but just returned from a long exile, surveyed the vast congregation with no other sentiment than pity for their folly and zeal for the Divine honour. He even treated their gross apostasy with gentleness, and called upon them to judge dispassionately between the merits of the religion they had abandoned, and the idolatry which they followed. In such a mixed assemblage, he knew there were some who, like Obadiah, the steward of the household, mourned in secret, and served God in the sincerity of their hearts. The prophet was also sensible, that many complied with the general abomination, either through timidity, or from a desire to recommend themselves to the patronage of the great. His remonstrance, however, was not the less keen because it was conveyed in language which gave them hope, while it condemned their conduct. They were justly reproached for having made an exchange without inquiry, and for adopting the superstitions of the heathen, not from conviction, but with indifference. There can be no union between error and truth, sin and holiness; and they who bend the principles of religion to worldly policy, and for the base purpose of serving their own ambition, or to avoid temporal inconvenience, will be found guilty of robbing God of his glory, injuring their fellow-creatures, and cheating their own souls. To the reproof of Elijah no answer was made; but when he proposed that the question at issue should be determined by a miracle, the people signified their approbation with one voice. Here the humility of the prophet was equal to the strength of his faith; for he gave the precedence to the priests of Baal, and waited patiently

from morning till evening, while they vainly invoked the presence of their deity.

The irony with which the servant of God treated these idolaters may seem to the superficial judgment unbecoming the dignity of his character; but it was in fact of a different description, expressive of the power of his faith, and calculated to awaken the minds of his hearers to a sense of their ingratitude, in having so long forsaken the fountain of life for an empty delusion. Nothing could more forcibly depict the stupidity of idolatry, than the laborious efforts of its votaries to bring down fire from heaven, while the minister of God sat with perfect composure encouraging them to perseverance, in terms which, if they had not been sunk in the depth of wickedness, would have made them ashamed of their extravagance. But there is an insatiation in folly by which men are led to oppose virtue, even when they are conscious of their imbecility, and to maintain error against the conviction of truth. Thus it was with these priests of Baal, who continued till the setting of the sun in their fruitless attempts to support the cause which they knew was hopeless; nor did they renounce it even when Elijah restored the altar of Jehovah, and by his prayer obtained the miraculous acceptance of his sacrifice. They, indeed, had an interest to promote, which may, in some measure, account for their obduracy; but Ahab ought to have been humbled under this signal victory, effecting, by his example, a national repentance; instead of which, he became hardened in his impenitence, and inveterate against the prophet, from whose ministration he had experienced both judgment and mercy. In the conduct of Elijah we behold the efficacy of prayer, by which he brought fire, and afterwards rain, from heaven. To this case the Apostle alludes, when he says, "The effectual fervent prayer of the righteous man availeth much. Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are,

and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again; and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit." James, v. 17, 18. This is the prayer of faith, which operates in a blessing upon the heart, and converts every wish and occurrence into the means of spiritual improvement; agreeably to what our Lord hath said, "What things soever ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." Mark, xi. 24.

MAY THE TWENTY-SECOND.

ELIJAH'S DESPONDENCY.

1 Kings, xix. 13.—*What dost thou here, Elijah?*

PERFECTION is not in man, and the strongest believers have their moments of forgetfulness, when they who could set their faces as a flint against a host of formidable enemies, shrink with fear before imaginary dangers. We have seen Elijah, in obedience to the Divine command, retiring to a dreary solitude, then residing for a considerable period among strangers, and all at once returning to encounter the fury of an enraged monarch, who had spared no pains to discover his hiding-place. Yet Ahab complies with the request of the prophet, and gathers all the elders of Israel, with the priests of Baal, to the place appointed, where the minister of God alone stands up in the defence of truth, and, armed with divine power, gains such a victory over error as brings the whole assembly to acknowledge the true God. After this wonderful change, it might have been expected that the great reformer would have remained to complete the work which he had begun; but the menace of Jezebel

alarmed the fears of Elijah, and he fled into the wilderness.—Such is the infirmity of human nature, even in those who are most raised above the world, and endowed with the largest portions of grace and wisdom. They can withstand the fiercest assaults of the wicked, and vindicate the cause of righteousness unmoved by terror, and secure from sophistry: but the reproaches of the feeble, the ridicule of the frivolous, and the calumnies of the scornful, ruffle their tempers to such a degree as to make them afraid when they should be firm, and wavering when it is their duty to be most active. Having destroyed the seducers of the people, and restored the altar of God, it became Elijah to prosecute the reformation with zeal; instead of which, the threat of an angry woman had more effect upon his mind than the king and his guards, the assembly of haughty princes, and a formidable body of sanguinary priests. So great was his timidity, that he appears to have been suspicious even of the fidelity of his servant, whom he left at Beersheba while he wandered alone in the desert. Yet the weakness of man, when it is not attended with any sinful compliances or positive disobedience, renders him an object of compassion. While the prophet slept under a juniper-tree, Divine goodness prepared refreshment for him, the strength of which enabled him to travel forty days and forty nights in the wilderness, till he came to Horeb, the Mount of God. Thus did the angel of the covenant, who comforted Elijah, support his church during the prevalence of infidelity, the corruptions of idolatry, and the silence of the prophets. When the leader of Israel received the body of laws for the government of that people, he fasted forty days and forty nights in the mount; and the Redeemer himself endured the like privation in the interval between his baptism and ministration; to show that the spiritual community of which he is the head, shall be preserved in spite of all opposition, being cherished by that grace which has no necessary depend-

ence upon external means, though it is generally imparted by the instrumentality of the word and ordinances. That the three persons who communed together on the Mount of Transfiguration should have been all distinguished by a similar fast and seclusion in the wilderness, was not without some design; and what this was our Lord explained, when he said, "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Matt. iv. 4. The object was the same in each case; being no other than to show that all the religious institutions were merely preparatory to one of a more refined nature, the indispensable qualification for which consisted in an abstraction from the things of time and sense, the renunciation of selfish desires, and a freedom from carnal fear. Elijah had much to learn in the way of duty; for it is evident he was not quite emptied of that worldly spirit which rises and falls according to the influence of circumstances and opinions. His former retirement had not brought his mind into a state of entire submission to the Divine will; nor did the late exercise of his faith effect a complete conquest over his passions. It was the same thing with the leader of Israel, who dashed the two tables of stone in pieces when he perceived the folly of the people; on which account he was obliged to fast forty days and forty nights in the mount, while engaged in the renewal of the written law. These eminent ministers of the Old Testament, though faithful, were deficient in some respects; and their very obedience was mixed with earthly affections; which made the religious services performed by them fall short of the Divine honour they were intended to advance. He alone who became an offering for sin, fulfilled all righteousness in absolute purity; and even he submitted to weariness of the flesh, that he might teach us to bring all our senses under submission, and to regulate our wills by the word of God. Elijah, having

reached the place of his destination, seems to have thought himself settled in the cave of Horeb; but on the night of his arrival, he was ordered to stand on the mount, where he witnessed successively the terrors of a tempest, an earthquake, and a fire; but it is said, that Jehovah was in none of these visitations. They went before him to indicate his approach; as the thundering and lightnings of the law preceded the gospel. When these supernatural convulsions were passed away, a small still voice succeeded, which said, "What dost thou here, Elijah?" This was the second time of his being so questioned; and his reply was the same: "I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts; because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, broken down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left: and they seek my life to take it away." The rebuke which he received for having quitted the post assigned him, was contained in this address;—"What dost thou here, Elijah?" This concise, but sharp interrogation, conveyed a twofold censure upon the fugitive prophet for abandoning his calling in the station where only he could be useful, to come, without any command, into that desert region. When the word of God directed him to return into Israel, it was certainly for some very important purposes; part of which were accomplished, and in such a way as ought to have encouraged him to remain in patient obedience to the Divine counsel, ready to labour and suffer in the cause of righteousness. By his flight he set a bad precedent to others, as it exposed the penitent to new temptations, and weakened the faith of those, who, at such a crisis, stood in need of his exhortations. Elijah knew that the Lord had some sincere servants left in this degenerate nation, and the late triumph over idolatry was an encouragement for him to hope that many more would be brought to repentance. The journey to Horeb taught the prophet, as the his-

tory should instruct us, not to despair under any circumstances when we are engaged in the interest of truth, and that the most atrocious sinners are not to be given up as past all remedy, because they have hitherto equally resisted the impressions of judgment and mercy. When the prospect is most dismal, let it stimulate us to fresh exertions, leaving the event to Him who said, "Yet have I seven thousand in Israel; all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him."

MAY THE TWENTY-THIRD.

THE MURDER OF NABOTH.

1 Kings, xxi. 20.—*And Ahab said to Elijah, Hast thou found me, O mine enemy? And he answered, I have found thee.*

THERE is hardly any vice more pernicious to society, or more abject and degrading to the persons defiled with it, than covetousness, because it destroys the sentiments of humanity, justice, honour, and religion. Other evil propensities are frequently balanced by some qualities which recommend the possessor to our esteem and pity; but the heart of the covetous is so charged with malice and envy, cunning and uncharitableness, that even those who have a similar disposition are jealous of each other. There is neither friendship nor compassion in the soul of him who is given up to the inordinate desire of wealth; for he has a natural dislike to every thing that stands between him and his darling object, by abridging his gains or lessening his store. At first he labours for what he calls ease and independence, thinking that the boundary drawn by his imagination will supply all his wants, and be the utmost extent of his wishes. But

as the prospect widens, he beholds new varieties of earthly good, the enjoyment of which he considers as necessary to complete the sum of his felicity : and thus the principle of rectitude decays, till the scruples which once made the mind just through fear, or uneasy by reflection, become so faint as to be unheeded, when the lust of riches can be satisfied only by the commission of crime. This passion is in scripture properly named idolatry, because, where it prevails, the fear of God is cast out, and every thought is turned towards the attainment of wealth, the chief requisite of human happiness. The covetous man is so far from raising his affections to heaven, that he thinks of nothing but the earth, and if he has no concern at all about religion, it is not that he is ignorant of such abstract notions as morality and religion, but that he favours his projects, by preserving his eyes from every thing which might oblige him to contract them ; and he calculates the means of carrying them into effect. He is a stranger to that faith which is worthily loved, because self is the idol and master-governor of all his actions ; whence it is that he never fails to condemn with rigour those doctrines and precepts which enforce purity of heart and poverty of spirit, because his temper and practice are at direct variance with the rules of self-denial. The man, however, is very willing to receive the blessing of religion if he can have it without being troubled in his sinful schemes and ill-gotten gains ; but if any faithful person points out the consequences of his courses, and demonstrates the need of a renewed heart, he says, like Ahab, “ I hate him, for he never prophesieth good of me, but evil.” This monarch is a striking example of the danger attending corrupt habits and vicious associations ; for though he had not his equal in the whole line of apostate kings after the separation of Israel from Judah, it is added, that he was not naturally of this black disposition, but that “ he sold himself to work wickedness in

the sight of the Lord, being stirred up to it by Jezebel his wife." Bad as Ahab was, he did not become so all at once; but having suffered an evil desire to get the ascendancy over him, he went on from one degree of enmity to another, till he allowed, for the attainment of a trifling object, the vilest of enormities to be perpetrated by his authority. The sight of a vineyard, pleasantly situated, excited the consideration that it could add materially to the value and beauty of his own estate. Ahab had lands enough, but this vineyard was so contiguous to them, that he could not hold it without remarking how useful it would be as a garden of herbs. Having conceived this idea, it became predominant, and the man fancied at last that the vineyard of Naboth was necessary to the completion of his views and the perfection of his estate. He offered to buy it; but as it was not lawful for an Israelite to sell the inheritance of his ancestors, the proposals of the king were firmly rejected. The scruple of Naboth was laudible, and ought to have been respected: but as Ahab had lost all regard for religion himself, he knew not how to reverence the sacred principle in others. That which should have cured him of covetousness by making him ashamed of his meanness, increased the malady by wounding his pride. He fell sick because he could not add an acre or two more to his estate; and even the reproaches of his abandoned wife failed in awakening him to a sense of his folly. But when, by her cruel contrivance, Naboth was cut off, under a false charge of treason and blasphemy, Ahab, without inquiring into the matter, went down to take possession of what he had so abominably acquired. Illicit pleasures and unjust gains may appear very agreeable in the prospect, but something bitter will poison the enjoyment of them. While Ahab was surveying with delight this addition to his domain, conscience deprived him of all the comfort which he had fondly expected to find.

in it, and destroyed by a sudden stroke the schemes and plans he had formed for its improvement. In the vineyard of Naboth he met the messenger of God, whose unexpected appearance at once alarmed his apprehensions, and confounded all his expectations. The scene which he had the moment before beheld with rapture, became now a frightful desert; and the terrified mind of Ahab was fixed in attention upon one well-known object, whose power he recognised in this fearful exclamation, "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?" Thus it is with sinners of every description, especially those who think that by accumulating worldly good and multiplying the means of sensual gratification they shall pass through life with little trouble, and end it in peace. But the hour of visitation will assuredly come, when the messenger of judgment shall start up before them, and turn all their riches and honours, pursuits and pleasures, into instruments of punishment. To such persons may be addressed the language of the prophet; "Forasmuch as your treading is upon the poor, and ye take from him burthens of wheat; ye have built houses of hewn stone, but ye shall not dwell in them; ye have planted pleasant vineyards, but ye shall not drink wine of them." Amos, v. 11.

MAY THE TWENTY-FOURTH.

THE DEATH OF AHAB.

- 1 Kings, xxii. 34 — *And a certain man drew a bow at a venture, and smote the king of Israel between the joints of the harness: wherefore he said unto the driver of his chariot, Turn thine hand, and carry me out of the host; for I am wounded.*

It is the observation of an inspired writer, who had made deep and extensive inquiries into human nature,

and the history of mankind in every condition of life, that "time and chance happeneth to them all." Eccles. ix. 11. But Solomon was too wise not to discover, and too pious not to confess, that "though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, it shall be well with them that fear God: but it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow; because he feareth not before God." Chap. viii. 12, 13. In his view of Providence, therefore, chance meant nothing short of that retribution which is the sure but secret consequence of all moral actions. He connects the apparent casualty with the period of its occurrence; because both are equally fixed and determined in the Divine intention, though neither can be accelerated or promoted by the wisdom and efforts of man. To us, nothing is certain, till it has actually taken place; but it is not so with Him who sees all things in their causes, and whose Spirit predicts events ages before they come to pass, without laying any constraint upon the human will, or binding the actions of men in the chain of absolute fate. What, therefore, we call chance, is only an effect, with the origin and connexions of which we are not acquainted, and perhaps are unable to trace, in the present contracted sphere of knowledge and observation. Even those occurrences particularly, which, to appearance, have no dependence upon any predisposing circumstances, are the result of motives that arise from some natural associations, and thus become directed to the accomplishment of prophecy by the very means adopted to defeat its purpose. We have a remarkable instance of this in the death of Ahab; the place and manner of which were accurately ascertained by the word of Elijah when he met the tyrant in the vineyard of Naboth. Now, it is possible that the king might think it easy to avoid a catastrophe which was so plainly defined; and his conduct in going disguised to the field of battle, showed

both his assurance and his cunning. He had been encouraged to undertake the expedition by the promises of success given with sufficient boldness by four hundred soothsayers: but when Micaiah, the prophet of God, declared the truth, and foretold the issue of the battle, the infatuated king ordered him to be thrown into prison, saying, "Feed him with the bread of affliction, and with water of affliction, until I come in peace." If, however, this impiety and cruelty indicated the confidence which he had of returning victorious, the precaution taken by him of laying aside the royal habiliments, plainly expressed his gloomy apprehensions. The Syrians were commanded to make the king of Israel the object of their attack, which induced them to press with eagerness after Jehoshaphat, till his declaration suspended the pursuit, and drew the attention of the assailants another way. In this moment of hesitation one of the soldiers, without design or aim, discharged an arrow, which inflicted a mortal wound upon the concealed monarch, whose blood was licked up by the dogs, in the very place that had been threatened by the prophet. Thus it happened, that the artifice of Ahab, and the disappointment of the Syrians, concurred in effecting what the one thought himself guarded against by his armour and his privacy, and what the others had given up as a hopeless attempt. This wicked man, if he had not so artfully endeavoured to secure his person, might have escaped by the exertions of his own people; and at the worst he could but have lost his liberty: for the chief desire of his adversaries was to take him alive. But the counsels of Heaven are immutable; while the actions of man remain free; and the word of prophecy is certain in all its parts, and to the fullest extent, with respect to time and circumstances, though the agents concerned have no other design than their own private advantage in the gratification of avarice, revenge, and ambition. From this incident we also

learn, that the judgments of God are usually slow, but always sure and exact, neither to be overcome by the combination of power and wisdom, nor to be eluded by craft and concealment! Let the fate of Ahab, supported as it is by continual experience, warn sinners against the dreadful evil of persisting in their wretched career because the sentence is deferred, and they see no approaching signs of its execution. Years may pass away; but the hour of retribution will come, in which all the scenes of joy and prosperity that were abused to the foolish purpose of dispersing thought and hindering repentance, shall add to the weight of misery, and sharpen the sting of reflection. Well then will it be for those who attend carefully to the Divine counsel, which thus speaks to every son and daughter of Adam; "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me; that I am the Lord, which exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord." Jerem. ix. 23, 24.

MAY THE TWENTY-FIFTH.

FIRE FROM HEAVEN.

2 Kings, i. 15.—*And the angel of the Lord said unto Elijah, Go down with him; be not afraid of him. And he arose and went down with him unto the king.*

THIS portion of the Sacred History has been laid hold of by infidels with avidity, to ground upon it the charge of cruelty and intolerance against revealed religion in general, and the character of an illustrious

prophet in particular. The fact, which has been perverted to the base purpose of discrediting the Divine authority of the inspired volume, was this : Azariah, the son of Ahab, regardless of the judgment which had fallen upon his father, according to the prediction of Elijah, sought in his sickness counsel and relief from the false deity of Ekron. The messengers sent upon this errand were met on the road by the prophet, who commanded them to return, with an assurance to their master, that he should surely die of his disorder for having renounced the God of Israel to inquire of Beelzebub. These men faithfully delivered the message of the prophet, though his person was not known to them ; for when Azariah asked what sort of man he was, they could only give such a description of his appearance as satisfied the monarch that it was no other than Elijah. Here, then, was an awful warning, and at the same time a gracious opportunity afforded to the king of regaining the Divine favour, and of rendering an essential benefit to the nation by an act of public repentance. But instead of turning to the Lord with contrition, and setting an example of penitential humiliation to the people, who had been long immersed in idolatrous corruptions, this vicious prince sent an armed force to seize the prophet, doubtless with the malicious intention of putting him to a cruel death. We have seen Elijah, on a former occasion, flying into the wilderness to avoid the fury of a bigoted woman ; but now he knew that all the powers of nature were under the controul of the God of Israel ; and that nothing could injure those who put their trust in him ; he waited the issue of this communication to Azariah, with patience, ready to suffer whatever might befall him, and to discharge any farther commands which he might receive from above. The captain of the band, on coming to the place where Elijah sat, treated him with an ir-

reverence which proved the degeneracy of the people under that evil government, and the necessity of inflicting a heavy punishment upon them and their king. In going out to take the prophet, these apostate Israelites were guilty of rebellion against the Most High, whose representative he was admitted to be, even by their own confession.

The leaders of the two companies, which perished, acknowledged Elijah to be the man of God, and yet with that conviction they opposed their earthly authority to his heavenly commission, and were resolute in setting his extraordinary powers at defiance. "If I then," said he, "be what you assert, let fire come down from heaven and consume you for your impiety." This was the purport of his answer; and the judgment which followed, however terrible it may appear, was no more than the ministerial execution of the Divine sentence upon sacrilegious persons, and all who endeavoured to support idolatry. Elijah, in these instances, acted not by any natural impulse of spirit, or out of passionate resentment at personal injuries, but merely as the agent of Divine power; so that the vehement zeal which occasions our astonishment, was the expression of strict justice, proceeding in reality from God, though spoken by the voice of man. This appears in the permission which the prophet received to accompany the third officer, who conducted himself with religious submission and respect to the Almighty and his minister. The death of the king established the reputation of the prophet, and contributed to diffuse more generally among the Israelites the dread of Him whose service they had ungratefully abandoned, and whose vengeance they had wickedly provoked by their abominations. In forming an opinion of this remarkable narrative, we should keep in view the extraordinary character and condition of the people among whom the circumstances occurred. Chosen by God to be his inheritance,

and governed by statutes specially imparted by himself, the children of Israel were his subjects, both in a temporal and spiritual sense; so that the mercies and judgments which happened to them, were frequently out of the ordinary course of Providence. Yet, peculiar as these were, we learn from them the certainty of the rule, that national prosperity and adversity are proportionable to national obedience and disobedience. The Sovereign of the universe looks for reverence to his majesty in an observance of his laws, and a respect for his institutions. Though, therefore, temporal chastisement may not now be so visibly displayed upon earth as in the dispensation which was purposely given to show the equity of his administration, we are assured, by these examples, that when the economy of grace shall be completed in the consummation of the redeemed Church, "judgment will be laid to the line, and righteousness to the plummet; and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding-place." Is. xxviii. 17.

MAY THE TWENTY-SIXTH.

THE CHILDREN OF BETHEL.

Kings, ii. 23, 24.—He went up from thence unto Bethel; and as he was going up by the way, there came forth little children out of the city, and mocked him, and said unto him, Go up, thou bald-head; go up, thou bald-head. And he turned back, and looked on them, and cursed them in the name of the Lord. And there came forth two she-bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them.

WHEN Elijah was removed from this earthly scene, to the world of light, without passing through the

ordinary course of mortality, a double portion of his spirit rested upon his successor Elisha, as the sons of the prophets witnessed in the miraculous division of the Jordan, and the healing of the waters belonging to the city of Jericho. These wonders, and the assumption of Elijah, became generally known throughout the country; yet such was the infidelity of the inhabitants of Bethel, that on the approach of the prophet Elisha in his way to Samaria, a body of young persons went forth to insult him on his personal appearance and his official character. The ridicule thrown upon himself would readily have been endured by the man of God; but the impiety of these profligates called for a signal mark of displeasure from the Almighty, whose authority was assaulted in this attack upon his servant. Moved by the Divine influence, Elisha denounced the judgment of God upon his persecutors, and immediately two enraged bears, from the forest, rent in pieces forty-two of them.

The mind is apt to regard this tragical scene with a mixture of horror and compassion, astonishment and concern, owing to the wrong ideas which are raised by the improper reading of our Bibles, where the provocation is lessened by an ambiguity of phrase, and the malignity of the offenders lost in the contemplation of their supposed simplicity and childish folly. As the story is told, we figure to ourselves a group of boys and girls playing in the high road, and insulting the venerable passenger on account of his hoary head and wearied limbs; while he, with angry looks and peevish accent, turns upon them, and vents his resentment in a bitter execration, which is speedily followed by a fearful destruction of the ringleaders. Such is the picture which the fancy draws of this transaction; and the representation of it in this view has been made an artful use of by infidels, for the purpose of throwing an odium upon the prophetic character, and of bringing the whole of the Inspired

Writings into discredit, on the groundless accusation of cruelty and injustice. But if the affair be thoroughly examined, and fully stated, we shall perceive an appearance of things the reverse of what may have been imagined out by an eager imagination, and heightened to the worst of purposes by conceit and prejudice. This Bethel, from being a place of renown for piety, was become a nest of idolaters ever since the establishment therein of the golden calf as an object of worship, by Jeroboam. Here that apostate and usurper formed a seminary of priests; and as the service of the idol was an advantageous concern, by which most of the inhabitants gained their wealth, we cannot wonder at the enmity conceived by them against the head of the sacred college. These youths, who insulted Elisha, but who are called very improperly little children, were in fact the students and sons of the principal people of Bethel, and they went out purposely to vilify and destroy the minister of God, being set on probably by their elders and parents. They began with mocking the prophet on account of his profession, and then proceeded to acts of greater violence, bidding him go up, or ascend, to heaven, as his master Elijah had done. In this tumultuary outrage and irreligious mockery, therefore, we may discern a malignant and determined confederacy, formed by the interested inhabitants of Bethel, to cut off the man whom they truly considered as the greatest enemy of their craft and corruption. Formidable indeed must have been the combination, when forty-two of these libertines fell a prey to the savage fury of the animals, which came out of the wood by the Divine direction. The beasts might have been sent among the scoffers without the solemnity of an imprecation; but it was proper that the abandoned citizens of Bethel should know the real cause of their calamity, to prevent them from ascribing that to casualty which was the infliction of

justice for their impiety and barbarity. The curse and the bears came from God, the prophet having no authority to utter the one or to command the other, but as he was moved by supernatural impulse, in the virtue of which he pronounced the denunciation, and the judgment followed as a confirmation of his word. They who escaped would not fail to relate the particulars of what had happened; and their report, if it produced no repentance in Bethel, must naturally have excited a sensation of awe and terror throughout Israel. Instead then of wondering at the supposed severity of this visitation, let us rather adore the goodness of God, who will assuredly defend his own honour in the persons of his servants. They that ridicule religion and persecute its followers, either in word or by actions, will find at last something to disturb their peace and to rend their consciences, though they may not be marked by any outward suffering. Age and sanctity are objects of peculiar reverence, which cannot be despised without insult to Him, who is described as the Ancient of Days, and the Father of Lights, before whom "the hope of the ungodly is like dust that is blown away with the wind; like a thin froth that is driven away with the storm; like as the smoke which is dispersed here and there with a tempest, and passeth away as the remembrance of a guest that tarrieth but a day." But the righteous live for evermore; their reward also is with the Lord, and the care of them with the Most High. Therefore shall they receive a glorious kingdom, and a beautiful crown from the Lord's hand: for with his right-hand shall he cover them, and with his arm shall he protect them. He shall take to him his jealousy for complete armour, and make the creature his weapon for the revenge of his enemies." Wisd. v. 14—17.

MAY THE TWENTY-SEVENTH.

THE SONS OF THE PROPHETS.

2 Kings, iv. 7.—*And he said, Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt, and live thou and thy children of the rest.*

IF the preceding history exhibited an awful view of the Divine indignation against idolaters and persecutors, we have now to contemplate the pleasing spectacle of mercy and goodness towards the seed of the righteous, in a remarkable illustration of that promise, "The Lord redeemeth the soul of his servants; and none of them that trust in him shall be desolate." Psalm xxxiv. 22. In the former instance, the people of Bethel were punished for their apostacy by the wickedness of their children, who were led to commit such an act of open hostility against the Majesty of heaven as brought upon them swift destruction. Soon after this, a very different scene presented itself to the prophet, in the melancholy condition of a poor widow and her two sons; the destitute family of one of God's faithful ministers. From hence we are cautioned not to estimate the character of men by their outward circumstances, and to avoid the error of considering extraordinary prosperity and adversity as marks of the Divine favour and displeasure. The inhabitants of Bethel were proud and licentious; yet were they not the less offensive to the Almighty because his providence suffered them to enjoy great wealth, and to live in luxury, while their city possessed the splendid distinctions of the royal chapel and the king's court. On the other hand, here was one of the sons of the prophets who feared the Lord with all his house, and yet he lived in such low and straitened circumstances as to leave his family in debt, without any property to discharge the demand that would be

made upon them; and, of course, unprovided with the means of subsistence. This surely was a distressing case, and such an one as might have induced the careless observer to pronounce that "all things come alike to all; there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked; to the good, and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not." Eccles. ix. 2. Had this servant of God minded wealth and honour more than conscience and duty, he might, no doubt, have received considerable advancement, and been highly esteemed at Bethel; but the good man was fixed in his principles and fervent in piety. He knew that "the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children, to such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them." Psalm ciii. 17, 18. With this trust and confidence the pious Israelite lived in contented poverty, resigning at his death the affectionate partner of his faith and cares, with their offspring, to the Divine protection. The character of the man is well expressed in the short account which his widow gave to Elisha, and it appears fully in the humility of her deportment, and the filial affection of the two sons. But the history at the same time shows the wretched state of the kingdom at this period, and that want of feeling which invariably follows the corruption of religion and the degeneracy of manners. Solomon hath observed, that "it is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting; for that is the end of all men, and the living will lay it to his heart." Eccles. vii. 2. Now here was a habitation so completely filled with woe, that hardly any one could be supposed to enter it without wishing to pour the balm of comfort effectually into the wounded hearts of the inhabitants. Yet we find there was one person so dead to all the feelings of humanity and religion, as to ag-

gravate by his severity the misery of the afflicted. It is a maxim founded even in natural policy, that the extreme of justice is injury; but here was a man who enjoyed the advantages of a revelation which taught the principle as the law of his God, and enforced the duty of charity by many explicit declarations in favour of the widow and the fatherless. So far, however, was this creditor from being moved by compassion or influenced by religion, that he determined at once to destroy the only hope which remained to these children of sorrow—that of living together for their mutual consolation and support. The law gave him a power to take the youths for servants or slaves, till the debt contracted by their parent was discharged, or the year of release should come. This privilege he enforced with rigour; and the unhappy mother, pressed down with the weight of affliction, had no other resource than to lay her grief open to the man of God. Her tale was artless, and she told it without any expression of murmuring or resentment against the rigid conduct of her oppressor. The prophet heard the affecting story with his wonted benevolence, and he soothed the complainant with this tender inquiry, “What shall I do for thee? tell me: what hast thou in thy house?” Her inventory was but small, and there was nothing that could be turned to any account but one pot of oil, which, to all human appearance, would afford no effectual assistance in the present exigency. But that Power who made the cruse of another pious widow effectual to the maintenance of her family in the time of general scarcity, was fully capable of rendering this little store an ample supply for the necessities of those who put their trust in his goodness. To the God of Elisha the pot of oil was not necessary; but in making use of such trifling means he taught many important lessons; the principal of which were perseverance and integrity, a reliance upon Divine aid, accompanied with the ut-

most application of our own powers. The Prophet directed the woman to collect all the vessels that she could procure from her neighbours : and said he, emphatically, " Borrow not a few. And when thou art come in, thou shalt shut the door upon thee and upon thy sons, and shalt pour out into all those vessels, and thou shalt set aside that which is full." Here his instruction closed, for this was a trial of faith, and that too of no common kind, since it required an extraordinary confidence in his word to expose herself to the ridicule and denial of her acquaintance. But this excellent woman feared God, and did as she was commanded ; the consequence of which was, that the bounty of Heaven supplied all her need. When she returned to Elisia with the report of what had happened, " Go," said he, " sell the oil, and pay thy debt, and live, thou and thy children, of the rest." From this we may learn, that justice precedes charity ; that the fruit of faith is righteousness ; and that when our prayers and labours have been crowned with the blessing of God, we must be guided by his counsel in the appropriation of what we have received solely from his benignity. Thus shall we experience in every state and circumstance of life the comfort of that promise, " Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness." Psalm cxii. 4.

MAY THE TWENTY-EIGHTH.

THE PIOUS SHUNAMMITE.

2 Kings, iv. 26.—*It is well.*

RELIGIOUS resignation is a virtue more easy to be defined and recommended than understood and practised. Many persons will give excellent counsels to the afflicted, hoping, by their officious attentions, to re-

lieve and strengthen the bleeding and breaking heart; but on finding that their efforts are ineffectual, they are astonished and almost angry at the obstinacy of grief, which refuseth to be comforted. Such men are truly styled "physicians of no value" by one who experienced the emptiness of that consolation which is drawn from the reasonings of human wisdom, and the speculations of moralists on the vicissitudes of life. When these declaimers fail to give relief by the force of argument, and to divert melancholy by the elegance of language, they are disposed to treat the object of their application with asperity, and to turn from him with contempt, as the same persecuted sufferer observed, "He that is ready to slip with his feet is as a lamp despised in the thought of him that is at ease." Job, xii. 5.

But as religion neither blunts the acuteness of feeling, nor makes men insensible to the painful visitations of Providence; so we find throughout the Scripture that the most exalted ministers always behaved towards the mourners with gentleness, and treated their exuberance of sorrow with silent compassion rather than with any formal exhortations and remarks. There is a striking instance of this in the history of Elisha, who in his frequent journeys through Shunem was hospitably entertained by the wife of one of the principal inhabitants. For all this kindness the prophet was anxious to make an adequate return; but the woman was truly great, and refused a very splendid offer that he made to her, observing, in answer to the dazzling proposal of high distinction at court, "I dwell among mine own people." She was contented with her situation, and felt no desire beyond the circle of her domestic connexions, and the enjoyment of pious tranquillity. In one respect, indeed, her condition was such as to be matter of some uneasiness to an Israelite, for she was childless. But even under this privation, which in every rank of life

was considered as a sore-trial, she maintained a cheerful disposition, the result of well-grounded faith; and her great delight was in the offices of charity. This piety was rewarded with a blessing, which, under all circumstances, could not have been hoped for; and she bare a son, according to the season that Elisha had foretold. Sanctified mercies, however, are frequently attended with crosses, which give them additional value, by preventing the mind from resting too fondly upon them, and forming expectations that will not be realized. This child grew up to be the delight of his parents; when suddenly he was seized with a complaint, of which he died in a few hours in the arms of his mother. Under such a sudden shock, too many would have lost all steadiness of judgment, and been either driven, by the whirlwind of passion into the wild extravagance of useless lamentation, or have fallen, without exertion, into the horroꝝ of despair. Not so the truly great and pious woman of Shunem; for keen as the stroke of affliction was to her tender heart, she knew that He who sent it could also heal the wound, or alleviate its agony. She laid the body of the child upon the bed of the Prophet, and desired of her husband "one of the young men, and one of the asses, that she might run to the man of God, and come again." To most persons, this request would have appeared as the certain proof of a disordered understanding, and the melancholy indication of a malady which friendship cannot ease, nor medicinal application remove.

The husband of this wonderful woman, surprized at her demand, gently endeavoured to dissuade her from the journey; but she overcame his objections by saying, "It shall be well." When the nature of the case is considered, this power of faith exceeds all others of the kind contained in the Divine records: for the deliberation with which the good woman conducted herself throughout this distressing scene; the

calmness of her spirit; the care which she took to suppress all parade of grief; and the comforting address to her partner, were all signs of her strong confidence in God. Elisha perceived his benevolent hostess at a considerable distance, and knew her, but not the errand on which she came. He was aware, however, that something unusual had occurred; and he sent his servant to make particular inquiries respecting herself, her husband, and her child; to all of which she answered, "It is well." That grief which is more vehement than lasting, breaks out in fresh exclamations whenever any new opportunity offers that may give scope to its violence. But the Shunammite refused to unbosom her sorrows to those who could not relieve them. Her concern was with God and his minister, to whom she might pour out the misery which oppressed her, with certainty at least of receiving that consolation and direction which would enable her to return lightened of her grief, if not rejoicing in its total removal. Though there lay a heavy load upon her heart, she bore it with fortitude, because she knew that the Power who placed it there could alone remove it; and she was too confident in the Divine goodness to murmur at that which, whatever might be the issue, was intended for her sanctification. To the questions therefore of Gehazi she answered, "It is well." Not that she had now ceased to feel her loss; but because she had a firm belief in the great truth, "that all things work together for good to them that love God." On coming into the presence of Elisha her tongue refused utterance to the overflowing of her agitated spirit, and she could barely murmur out the cause of her visit in such terms as made him sensible of what had happened. The sequel of the narrative reflects equal honour on this excellent character; for without betraying any symptoms of uneasiness, she would not accompany Gehazi when he departed to the house

with orders from his master to lay his staff upon the child. Many, on hearing this direction, would have been eager to see it duly performed; but the Shunammite had more patience, and chose rather to wait for the event, in submission to the Divine will, than to hasten the accomplishment of it according to her wishes by importunity. She ran to the mount where the man of God resided; but when she had unfolded her tale of woe, she was content to follow the slow movements of age with resignation. Thus should we act in every case of trouble and disquietude, waving all other concerns, and repairing with earnestness to the throne of grace; after which it becomes us to watch silently and without perturbation for what Infinite Wisdom shall think proper to bestow. When this good woman saw her child restored to life, "she fell at the feet of the prophet, and bowed herself to the ground, and took up her son and went out." Both in sorrow and in joy she displayed that placid disposition and quietness of spirit which will always be found the best evidence of grace, and the strongest security against the snares of prosperity and the floods of affliction. Let us then, if we would attain the happy temper of this woman, study carefully the apostolical advice; "Follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, and meekness." 1 Tim. vi. 11. When we have been well trained in this school, and all our affections are brought into a state of submission to the Divine government, every occurrence of life will be rendered profitable to ourselves, though it may draw upon us the pity or contempt of the world. The yoke of affliction will lighten as we go on in this course of preparation for a higher state of knowledge, and thus with every new trial we shall be enabled to say, "Thy will be done!"

MAY THE TWENTY-NINTH.

THE CURE OF NAAMAN.

2 Kings, v. 14.—*Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God; and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.*

THE history of Naaman, the prime minister and commander of the armies of Syria, abounds with instructive incidents, and affords many lessons of importance for the regulation of faith and practice. We are told that this person stood equally high in the estimation of his sovereign and the people, “because by him the Lord had given deliverance unto Syria,” but as an alloy to this high distinction and renown, it is added, “he was a leper.” So dreadful was this distemper considered in the East, that there was not a man throughout the kingdom who would have exchanged his own poverty and wretchedness for the splendour and leprosy of the grand vizier. Doubtless, Naaman neither spared pains nor expense to procure a remedy; but his case was hopeless, and rendered him an object of dread and compassion; for the disorder, which is called by the Arabian physicians a universal cancer, was infectious, and cut off those afflicted by it from the endearments of society. Distressing, however, as the condition of this eminent statesman was, it proved a real blessing; for when, to all human appearance, he had nothing to expect but to linger out the remainder of life in continual misery, Providence was bringing about the cure of his corporeal and mental malady by the same means. To effect this, another painful circumstance was permitted to take place, which filled an amiable and pious family with great affliction; for the Syrians, in one of

their predatory excursions in the coasts of Israel, made captive a little maid, and she waited on Naaman's wife. The parents and friends of this young female must have been greatly affected by the loss of one whom they had no chance of ever seeing again ; and, to increase their sorrow, she was in the hands of idolaters, the enemies of her faith as well as of her country. One consolation indeed remained to them, and this arose from the reflection that they had discharged their duty, by bringing her up in the knowledge of the truth and the fear of God. That she was well-grounded in the principles of religion appeared from the confidence with which she spoke of its most distinguished minister ; and that she had imbibed the true spirit of it, was proved in her benevolent and sympathetic desire to render essential service to her master. When she heard her fellow-servants lament his sad situation, she exclaimed with the ardour of faith, and the fervency of love. " Would to God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria ! for he would recover him of his leprosy." The saying of the little maid was quickly reported to Naaman, who despised not the credulous simplicity of a child, but hastened to his sovereign, and obtained from him a letter to the king of Israel, desiring him to cure the bearer of his leprosy. Jehoram reigned at that time ; but so little faith had he in God, or knowledge of the prophet, that he construed the epistle into an intention on the part of the Syrian monarch to seek an occasion of quarrel against him. Elisha, being informed of what had happened, and the cause of it, sent a severe reproof to the king, with this dignified declaration to the Syrian general : " Let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel." The striking contrast between the piety of the little captive, and the infidelity of the king, shows the peculiar advantages which result from a religious education, and the deplorable state of those

who have been brought up without any respect for the Divine ordinances. This poor female had such a reverence for the prophet, that she bore witness to his extraordinary powers, and the goodness of God, in the palace of a heathen; while Jehoram, who lived near Elisha, seems to have been unacquainted with his miraculous gifts, or to have thought little of them, when an opportunity presented itself of trying their efficacy. Here was a country distinguished by miracles and prophecy, yet its king was so wretchedly ignorant or prejudiced, as not to concern himself about such things, while a helpless female proclaimed them without fear among the enemies of her faith in a strange land. Naaman, on hearing the message, went accordingly to the house of the prophet, who did not, however, condescend to go out and receive him as he expected, but sent him this message, "Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again unto thee, and thou shalt be clean." This seeming rudeness was intended to correct that pride of heart, which as it is natural to all men, so must it be subdued before any one can be born again of water and the Spirit. This haughty Syrian was equally surprised at the behaviour of the man of God, and the precept which he sent to him; the one being apparently as uncourteous, as the other was humiliating. "Behold," said he, "I thought, he will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? May I not wash in them and be clean? So he turned, and went away in a rage." This is the true picture of man till he is enlightened by Divine grace, and brought into that state of self-denial which is necessary to the cleansing of his mind from all impurity. The consequence of Naaman was hurt by the deportment of Elisha, and his national vanity received a severe mortification in this injunction,

which made him go from the place in great anger. Thus would he have thrown from him the only cure that could be obtained for his dreadful complaint, if his servants had not, by their importunity, prevailed upon him to follow the directions that were given him. Happy was it for this eminent man, that he had discretion enough to hear advice, even though it came from his dependents. He listened to their counsel, did as he was instructed, and returned to the house of the prophet, not only with a renovated body, but a renewed mind. The miracle, besides healing him of his loathsome malady, removed the fouler ulcer of unbelief which had defiled his faculties; so that having become truly like a little child, he said, "Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel: and henceforth thy servant will offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto Jehovah." In this extraordinary conversion of Naaman we have a figure of the miraculous change wrought on the Gentiles by the preaching of the Gospel, and their joyful acceptance of what was obstinately rejected by the Jews. The little maid may be said aptly to have represented the apostolical church in her infant state, opening the door of salvation to those who were dead in trespasses and sins; while the immersion in Jordan as strongly set forth that divine ordinance by which alone we "become members of His spiritual body, who filleth all in all." Eph. i. 23. To this application of the history are we directed by an infallible Interpreter, who thus reproved his countrymen for their obduracy: "Many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisens the prophet; but none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian." Luke, iv. 27.

MAY THE THIRTIETH.

THE PUNISHMENT OF GEHAZI.

2 Kings, v. 27.— *The leprosy of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever. And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow.*

WE have been contemplating some remarkable instances of faith in the preceding part of this history ; but our attention is now called to a different character, and to the awful spectacle of a man possessing all the advantages of religious information, yet giving himself up to the world, and sinning against light and knowledge. When Naaman returned to the house of the prophet, his grateful heart overflowed with the expression of his pious feelings, and he earnestly intreated the man of God to accept some present as a small tribute of respect for the great kindness which he had conferred. But Elisha steadily refused to take any thing, being careful of the Divine honour, and desirous of making the new convert acquainted with this essential truth, that “ the grace by which we are saved is the gift of God.” Eph. ii. 8. There was nothing improper in the offer of the Syrian, nor would the prophet have been wrong in receiving a donation at his hands under any other circumstances ; but in the present case it was necessary that the sole glory of this great recovery should be given to Him alone, by whose mercy it had been accomplished. With the same view it was also an act of goodness towards Naaman himself, because hereby he was cautioned against the dangerous error of resting in second causes, and of even being tempted to think that any part of the blessing which had been bestowed upon him came from the skill of man, who effected it by natural means. Such was the serious and solemn reso-

lution of Elisha to take nothing of what was repeatedly urged upon him by this Syrian nobleman. But the servant of the prophet, when he beheld these treasures, was actuated by other sentiments; and the covetous desire having gained possession of his heart, he began to be unhappy on seeing so many good things packed up again, and carried away, through what he conceived and pronounced to be a mere silly scruple on the part of his master. All the discourses which he had heard, and the miracles witnessed by him, failed to correct his base and grovelling disposition. The riches so unexpectedly rejected, had excited in his mind many pleasing ideas, and the anticipation of enjoying by their means "oliveyards and vineyards, and sheep and oxen, and men-servants and maid-servants." But when all these flattering prospects were destroyed by the disinterested behaviour of his lord, the mercenary spirit of Gehazi was filled with resentment, and he determined to obtain that by fraud from which he was withheld by integrity. He followed Naaman, and forged a petition in the name of his master, when he might have had what he desired by asking it for himself. The generous statesman was glad of an occasion which gave him an opportunity of showing his gratitude liberally, and he doubled the request of the dishonest domestic, who carefully concealed his ill-gotten wealth, and went about his business as if nothing had happened. To do him justice, he managed the affair with considerable dexterity, and imposed upon Naaman with great address. But there was one whom he could not deceive; for the Almighty, whose name Gehazi profaned, guided the spirit of the prophet to the scene of iniquity, and made him acquainted with the actions and thoughts of his servant. Covetousness is the parent of many follies, and so it was here; for this man having succeeded so well, as he thought, in cheating a stranger, imagined it possible to do the same by a prophet. The

ready lie, however, was quickly detected, and the sacrilegious treachery punished by a lasting ignominy, the leprosy of Naaman being transferred to this Israelite and his posterity for ever. While we learn from this narrative the danger of indulging an unlawful desire, and the necessity of guarding against the first temptation to covetousness, which is idolatry, we may discern in Naaman and Gehazi, the opposite state of the Jewish people and the heathen world at the first promulgation of the Gospel. The former, amidst all the evidences of miracle and prophecy, remained blind and obdurate; the consequence of which was, that the leprosy of infidelity, with which the Gentiles had so long been afflicted, became the judgment of this apostate nation. Thus was verified to the fullest extent what this history figured, and the word of prophecy more fully and clearly expressed; "Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand, and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: for the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed, lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them." Isa. vi. 9. Acts, xxviii. 26, 27.

MAY THE THIRTY-FIRST.

THE TREACHERY OF HAZAEL.

2 Kings, viii. 13.—*Hazael said, But what, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing? And Elisha answered, The Lord hath showed me that thou shalt be king over Syria.*

THIS narrative is a striking illustration of that awful description of human nature, given in the Inspired

Volume; "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" Jerem. xvii. 9. Benhadad, the king of Syria, being dangerously ill, and hearing that Elisha was in his capital, sent Hazael, his prime minister, to enquire of the man of God whether he should recover of that disease. The answer of the seer, according to most of the versions, was very ambiguous: "Go, say unto him, Thou mayest certainly recover: howbeit, the Lord hath showed me, that he shall surely die." Supposing this reading to be the only correct one, the meaning amounts to no more than that the sickness of the monarch was of itself curable, and consequently, that by proper means he might be restored to health. But this is in fact the marginal reading of the Hebrew Bibles, and it has been adopted by our translators in common with most others, though why they should have preferred it to the textual reading, is difficult to conceive; for the last is certainly most agreeable to the character of the prophet, and consonant to the event which really occurred. By following this construction, the true rendering will be thus: "Go, say, Thou surely shalt not live: for the Lord hath showed me, that he shall certainly die." When the prophet pronounced this oracle, he settled his countenance stedfastly, or looked so fully and intently upon the face of the messenger as to make him ashamed. But if Hazael was uneasy at this scrutinizing observation, his concern became much greater on seeing the prophet in tears. The manner of Elisha disturbed the spirit of the ambitious courtier, who could not stand the penetrating glance of wisdom and virtue; but when the struggling emotions of sorrow and indignation burst forth in a vehement expression of grief, the statesman was astonished, and said, "Why weepeth my lord?" This question, so apparently artless, proceeded from that restless inquietude, which is mixed with

fear and the consciousness of guilt. There is a lofty dignity in holiness, which renders timid even the deeply stained soul of the haughtiest sinner upon earth, especially when to superior sanctity of character is added the acuteness of intellectual energy. Hazael inquired, with a trembling accent, why the prophet wept, little thinking, however bad his own heart might be, that the prospect of his crimes was the cause of this extraordinary agitation and sorrow. Elisha had no hesitation in revealing to him the occasion of his anguish, for which, indeed, two sufficient and powerful reasons might be assigned: the first is, that by so doing he discharged his duty to Israel, in pointing out to this wicked man the catalogue of miseries which would flow from his ambition. The second was nearly the same, being an act of charity towards Hazael and his master, by showing the former what would be the train of consequences flowing from a single crime; thus warning him in time against the temptation which was then coming upon him.

The prophet said, "I know the evil that thou wilt do unto the children of Israel; their strong holds wilt thou set on fire, and their young men wilt thou slay with the sword, and wilt dash their children, and rip up their women with child." This shocking picture of depravity alarmed the countier; and the more so, as it was the prospective sketch of his own actions. He shuddered at the dismal scene, and endeavoured to persuade both himself and the enlightened seer, that this vile character could not possibly belong to him; "But what," he exclaimed, "is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?" The man knew not the depth of his own wickedness, and he flattered himself, like too many who enter upon a vicious course of life, that his inclination and resolution would preserve him at all times from falling into those offences which cast the

perpetrator out of the rank of humanity. The illuminated understanding of the prophet discerned all this enumeration of transgressions involved in one atrocious deed, and therefore he shortly replied to the warm effusion of Hazael, "The Lord hath showed me, that thou shalt be king over Syria." This was an indication in what way the career of infamy would begin; and the statesman was therefore duly cautioned of his danger before he touched the threshold from whence there would be hardly any retreat. But Hazael neither profited by the tenderness of Elisha, and his faithful declaration, nor paid any farther attention to his own affrighted conscience. He forgot both the one and the other, in the brilliancy of the prediction; and having first lulled his master into a state of false security, by telling him a lie, he seized his throne the next morning, after depriving him of his life. Thus an evil desire produced treason; and that black roll of woes, the description of which so much offended this unprincipled minister, soon followed in a rapid succession; so true is the observation of the Wise Man: "The way of the wicked is as darkness; they know not at what they stumble." Prov. iv. 19.

JUNE THE FIRST.

THE ZEAL OF JEHU.

2 Kings, x. 16.—*And he said, Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord.*

As in the natural world storms and tempests, diseases and earthquakes, are intended to effect many important changes for the general benefit, so it is in the moral government of God, who turns the bad passions of mankind to various purposes connected

with the general scheme of Providential order ; and out of their worst actions educes good. One evil is commonly the corrector of another, and most of the alterations which have taken place on the globe, in the fall of mighty nations, and the formation of new states on their ruins, have been the result of internal disorder or outward violence, the intrigues of faction or the rapacity of ambition. It is therefore necessary to distinguish between the actors in these scenes and the Power that over-rules them, the motives by which they are guided, and the design of Him who permits and restrains them in the execution of their schemes, saying, " Thus far shall ye go, and no farther." But, unfortunately, too many are inclined to measure merit according to external condition, and to lose sight of depravity amidst the splendour of success ; while some, it is to be feared, are induced to " call evil, good, and good, evil ;" when they see the " wicked walking on every side, and the vilest men exalted." Ps. xii. 8. This distribution of judgment, however, is equally a proof of Infinite wisdom and mercy, since extraordinary sinners are the most proper instruments to punish heinous transgressors ; and extreme corruption is seldom purged but by that violence which is incompatible with the meek and pacific character of the righteous. There is a further propriety in this course of proceeding, as it sets forth the deformity of vice in its most terrific appearances, and keeps it within due limits, by the permission of occasional outrages, which counteract the mischief that might be produced by more combined and equable operations. The usurpations and revolutions of which we read in the Scripture, were the acts of human malignity ; but ruled and directed by a secret power, for the accomplishment of the Divine decrees. One of these great convulsions in society was that in which the denunciation upon Ahab's family was fulfilled, to its utmost extent of

vengeance, by the impetuosity of Jehu. The communication which this man received from one of the prophets, though it was a positive assurance that he should reign over Israel, gave him no instructions with respect to the means by which that advancement was to take place. But instead of waiting for the performance of the promise, as David did in a similar case, Jehu went immediately, and conspired with his companions in arms against Jehoram, whom he slew with his own hand, on the estate of Naboth the Jezreelite. Thus was completed the word which Elijah had pronounced on that spot, when Ahab went to take possession of the vineyard obtained for him by treachery and murder. Jehu was present on that occasion, and his remembrance of the circumstance encouraged him to proceed with greater fury in destroying all that remained of his master's house, and those who were in alliance with it, particularly Ahaziah, king of Judah, and forty-two of his relations. In the course of his sanguinary career, Jehu met Jehonadab, the son of Rechab, a man so eminent for his ascetic life, as to be held in great reverence, even by those who had little inclination to imitate his temperate habits and pacific deportment. This interview was highly gratifying to Jehu, who gladly embraced the opportunity of showing his regard for religion to one of its most distinguished ornaments; so he took Jehonadab into the chariot, and said, "Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord." Jehonadab was neither priest nor prophet, yet he was a good man; and the piety of his descendants, in following scrupulously the rules which he left, is recorded with commendation in the prophecy of Jeremiah.

The zeal of which Jehu made such boast, was fiery and ostentatious, the effusion of self-will and pride, which made him desirous of the co-operation of religious persons, who were actuated by the best of

motives, while his own were only popular applause and the establishment of his power. He was now engaged in a work which, properly managed, would have done him honour ; but the spirit and manner in which he acted, plainly proved his insincerity and total want of virtue, while he pretended to be influenced by the purest of all principles. By taking Jehonadab to the temple of Baal, and ordering a great sacrifice, at which all the worshippers of the idol assisted, he disarmed them of their fears, and inspired them with confidence. This subtle proceeding, by which he contrived to perpetrate a shocking massacre, commenced with a falsehood, which some have inconsiderately endeavoured to justify, without regarding the immutability of the rule, that " in no age, nor under any circumstance, has man authority to commit evil that good may come of it." If the vanity of Jehu in the first instance, and his own final idolatry, be attended to, we shall have no difficulty in judging this subtilty to have been the artifice of a mind more intent upon its own purposes than the Divine glory ; and consequently that the zeal of this man, whatever important ends it might bring about, was the mere affectation of holiness. Jehu probably deceived himself into a belief that his furious rage against the house of Ahab and the followers of Baal, was perfectly agreeable to the Almighty, whose instrument he undoubtedly was ; but though the man executed what had been secretly appointed and in general terms predicted, he was answerable for his own motives in the undertaking, which if they were wrong, brought upon him a severe condemnation. It is not sufficient that a matter be right, but the spirit in which we enter upon it must be right also ; and the means adopted for the prosecution of it must be strictly conformable to the dictates of justice and the precepts of God's word ; otherwise all our warmth and activity, whatever may be the

result, will prove an abomination in His sight, who desireth truth in the inward parts, and saith of all such zealots as affect, like Jchu, an uncommon attachment to his service and concern for his honour ; “ This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips ; but their heart is far from me.” Is. xxix. 13. Matt. xv. 8.

JUNE THE SECOND.

THE PIETY OF HEZEKIAH.

2 Kings, xviii. 4.—*He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made ; for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it, and he called, it Nehushtan.*

IF the preceding history exhibited zeal without godliness, and a reformation carried on in an intemperate and vengeful spirit, we have now to contemplate one of a very different description, in which the work and its agent were of a correspondent character. Though Judah did not fall so generally nor foully into idolatrous practices as the sister kingdom, she partook in no small degree of those corruptions which defiled Israel ; and in the reign of Ahaz, the forms of paganism were introduced into the temple, with the connivance of the high priest. Of the excessive superstition of Ahaz, this remarkable account is given in the Book of Chronicles : “ In the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the Lord : this is that king Ahaz. For he sacrificed unto the gods of Damascus which smote him : and he said, Because the gods of the kings of Syria help them, therefore will I sacrifice to them, that they

may help me : but they were the ruin of him, and of all Israel. And Ahaz gathered together the vessels of the house of God, and cut in pieces the vessels of the house of God, and shut the doors of the house of the Lord, and he made him altars in every corner of Jerusalem. And in every several city of Judah he made high places to burn incense unto other gods, and provoked to anger the Lord God of his fathers." 2 Chron. xxviii. 22—25. Yet this reign was favoured by an unusual splendour of prophetic light in the ministry of Hosea, Micah, and Isaiah, whose revelations failed to convince the besotted monarch of his error, in ascribing that to foreign power which was the effect of national transgression, heightened by his example. Though in Judah the worship of the true God had not been wholly abandoned, it was, even under the best princes, mixed with many evil customs, which increased by indulgence, till at last Ahaz polluted the whole land with the abominations of the heathen. Such was the state of this part of God's inheritance when Hezekiah ascended the throne ; but so far was he from being infected with the principles of his father, or indifferent to the profane usages which had prevailed, even under some of the best kings ever since the time of Solomon, that he resolved to bring the public service back to its original purity, according to the fixed standard of the Divine Word. He was not satisfied with removing the altars erected by his father, and destroying the images imported from the Syrians, but he took away those high places and groves which Jehoshaphat and other pious princes had allowed to stand, because probably they conceived there was no harm in these things, when the ceremonies there observed were no longer permitted. But Hezekiah, as he judged with more wisdom, so he acted with greater consistency and firmness ; for he knew, that, by a very natural association, vain

minds would hanker after a repetition of those rites to which they had been accustomed, if the fanes and groves, set apart for idolatrous festivals, were suffered to remain in view. It was vain to think of recalling the people to a spiritual religion, and of establishing them in the faith of their ancestors, if the vestiges of impurity were allowed to awaken in them the gross sensations inseparable from heathenism. Many objects, in themselves indifferent, and perhaps allowable when applied to things which have no connexion with religion, are pernicious if they interfere with that most solemn of all concerns, by drawing the heart from its affection to God. Nothing is more common than to hear such light and frivolous remarks as these, from persons who would reconcile the profession of religion with a conformity to the world: "What harm can there be in a taste for fashionable pleasures, and how is the mind endangered by indiscriminate reading? What evil is there in frequenting amusements which unbend the cares of life, or of mixing in societies that enlarge the sphere of practical knowledge, and give a polished softness to our sentiments and manners?" To all this the plain answer is sufficient, that as bad habits are acquired by the indulgence of desire, and become fixed by the frequency of enjoyment, so the sense of virtue is weakened by sinful communications, and the love of truth itself is lost out of civility to persons and tenderness to their prejudices. The safest way, then, to maintain a conscience void of all offence towards God and man, is to be cautious of forming friendships, and indulging propensities, which have any tendency to produce evil impressions; or to make the mind familiar with ideas that by relation may become the sources of corruption. We should herein imitate the zeal of Hezekiah, who removed the high places and brake in pieces the images, without regarding the agreeable situation of the one or

the workmanship of the other. Nay, he went even farther than this ; for on the same principle the good king destroyed a relique of peculiar value in itself, and one that upon many accounts was entitled to reverence. This was the brazen serpent, set up by the founder of the nation, in the wilderness, for the relief of the people, who were visited by a dreadful judgment. The preservation of such a monument of mercy appears certainly to have been highly praiseworthy ; nor was there any impropriety in paying respect to this venerable record of a miraculous deliverance ; and which had, besides, a typical cast and allusion to a still greater salvation, the hope of Israel, and the joy of the whole earth. But as the best institutions are liable to abuse, and innocent customs sometimes become the means of introducing vicious practices ; so the family of Jacob, having once given way to superstitious inclinations, easily brought themselves into the belief that there was an inherent virtue in this piece of antiquity. It therefore became an object of worship ; and that which originally represented the restorer of health and immortality, was made an idol, before which the infatuated Israelites burnt incense, as to a Divinity, contrary to His law who gave their fathers this outward emblem of his grace. The reformer of Judah then acted with a noble elevation of soul, in destroying even this national memorial when he found it prostituted to a vain and disorderly purpose. It seems as if the silly multitude had been accustomed to call this serpent by some high appellative, denoting its divine efficacy ; on which account, when Hezekiah brake it to pieces, he stigmatized it with the degrading epithet of *Nehushtan*, or a piece of brass ; thus accompanying this purgation with the lesson of general instruction, that whatever might have been the value of the thing as an article of curiosity and antiquity, it was in itself nothing but contemptible metal. This instance of

pious zeal, while it shows the necessity of sacrificing even innocent objects, when they are made the means of folly, points out also the important consideration, that public reformation must be left to those who are vested with the proper authority. There were many prophets in the time of Hezekiah and his predecessors, yet none of them took upon him to remove the high places, or to destroy the brazen serpent, conceiving that the correction of these abuses lay with the civil magistrate. We have here then a striking proof, that it is our duty to avoid all superstitious services ourselves; and to exercise patience and charity towards those who are unhappily infected by them. Though, as the Apostle observes, "It is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing;" this must be for the regulation of our own principles, and the stability of our own faith; but towards others our religious zeal must be animated by the spirit of love, which "beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things." 1 Cor. xiii. 7.

JUNE THE THIRD.

THE FATE OF SENNACHERIB.

2 Kings, xix. 37.—*And it came to pass, as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons smote him with the sword: and they escaped into the land of Armenia; and Esarhaddon, his son, reigned in his stead,*

IN the history of the conquest of Israel by the king of Assyria, and the unsuccessful attempt of Sennacherib upon Judah, we see the sure consequences of national depravity, and the blessing attending a timely

reformation of principles and manners. That haughty monarch having made himself master of Samaria, and carried away the ten apostate tribes into captivity, thought the fall of Jerusalem would be equally easy ; and to all human appearance there was little hope of its being able to stand against the formidable force which came against it. But when Rabshakeh, the Assyrian general, menaced the destruction of the kingdom, and breathed defiance against its Divine Protector, Hezekiah piously commanded the people to be silent, or to wait in patience while he went himself into the house of the Lord, and sent a deputation to Isaiah the prophet. The humble address of the good king was immediately answered with a gracious assurance that the blasphemer, instead of accomplishing his threat, should be defeated by a sudden blast, and fall by the sword, in his own land. These two predictions were remarkably fulfilled ; for when Sennacherib came in person to renew the siege the year following, after prosecuting his Ethiopian war, his army experienced so dreadful a visitation, in one night, that only a small number escaped into their own land, where, not long after, the tyrant fell by the hands of his two sons in the temple of Nisroch, his god. When it is said that the angel of the Lord destroyed in the course of a single night one hundred and eighty-five thousand of the Assyrians, the mind pauses with astonishment at the magnitude of the judgment, and the extent of the devastation performed by a single agent. But in the encouraging promise given by the prophet, it was said that the Lord would send a blast, or wind, upon the invader ; and this in fact was the messenger, which in the narrative is termed an angel. This instrument of Divine vengeance was, doubtless, that terrible and burning wind, called the Simoom, which is so instantaneous in its effects as to sweep off whole armies at a stroke. The air, poisoned by it, becomes the immediate

minister of death, from which there is no chance of escape to those who breathe the smallest portion of the pestilential vapour. In the seventy-sixth Psalm, which is commemorative of the deliverance of Hezekiah from the fury of Sennacherib, this fearful calamity is described exactly according to the symptoms always observed wherever this wind spreads destruction. The Psalmist thus paints the state of the Assyrians who fell by the fiery blast: "The stout-hearted are spoiled, they have slept their sleep; and none of the men of might have found their hands. At thy rebuke, O God of Jacob, both the chariot and horse are cast into a dead sleep. Thou didst cause judgment to be heard from heaven; the earth feared, and was still, when God arose to judgment, to save all the meek of the earth." Psalm lxxvi. 5—9. Still the judgment was not the less miraculous, because the agent, through the instrumentality of which it was effected, is ascertained; on the contrary, our ideas are raised from the tremendous object to the mighty Power that ruleth over the elements, "fire and hail, snow and vapour, stormy wind; fulfilling his word." Ps. cxlviii. 8. Here was one of the most potent despots of the East, at the head of a victorious host, intent upon pouring his malicious fury against Judah, for resisting his will and trusting in the Divine aid. Sennacherib knew that both kingdoms were of the same parent stock, had the same language, and originally professed the same faith; as, therefore, Israel had been so easily conquered, he thought it high presumption in Hezekiah to oppose his will, by relying upon the goodness of Jehovah. Now, as the dependence of this pious monarch, and the blasphemy of his oppressor, could not fail to be generally known; the prophetic denunciation, which doomed the invader to a fearful end, must have been widely circulated also; when, therefore, the mortal blow fell with such terrible

vengeance, even they who had witnessed more than once the horrors of a burning wind, would be struck with this coincidence of circumstances, and confess the arm of Omnipotence in the awful scene. But if any were disposed at first to rest in the consideration of second causes, yet, on hearing of this awful catastrophe, they would be filled with astonishment at the completion of the prediction, when they heard of the murder of Sennacherib by his own children. The whole of this history teaches us the important doctrine, that the Almighty in his providence will relieve those who put their trust in him, by the very means which he adopts to punish his enemies. Every breath of wind that blows, while it wafts his mercies, becomes, though we may not immediately perceive its operation, the instrument of judgment, by which the proud are brought low and the righteous are delivered. That which is a fiery and burning plague to the impenitent, spreading disease and desolation among those who have resisted every other warning, will be cause of thanksgiving to the meek of the earth. Amidst, therefore, the perplexities of nations, and the raging of the people, like the billows of the tumultuous ocean, the quiet and resigned spirit discerns the over-ruling agency of infinite goodness, and can say, "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee; the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain. Vow and pray unto the Lord your God: let all that be round about him bring presents unto Him that ought to be feared. He shall cut off the spirit of princes: he is terrible to the kings of the earth." Ps. lxxvi. 10—12.

JUNE THE FOURTH.

THE SICKNESS OF HEZEKIAH.

2 Kings, xx. 11.—*And Isaiah the prophet cried unto the Lord; and he brought the shadow ten degrees backward, by which it had gone down in the dial of Ahaz.*

THERE is something terrible in the apprehension of dissolution, or the separation of soul and body, even though it is the irrevocable law of nature, and “the living know that they shall die.” Eccles. ix. 5. He that affects to be unmoved by this prospect may obtain credit for his boasted firmness with those who judge by appearances; but the heart of sensibility will pity rather than admire an indifference, which is at variance with the common sentiments of mankind, and indicates an unconcern about the progress of our being through the various stages of consciousness. The love of life is an inherent principle implanted in all creatures, for the general good in the preservation of the several species; but that which is instinct in the irrational orders, becomes a natural duty in man, who is bound to use every means for the improvement of his condition in this state of probation, with a view to that which is to come. “In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand; for thou knowest not whether shall prosper either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good. Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun: but if a man live many years, and rejoice in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many.” Eccles. xi. 6—8. This duty of preserving life with a constant preparation for death, may seem irreconcilable; but the truth is, that the two principles are indispensibly necessary to that moderation

of desire and enjoyment, which constitutes the only happiness we can reasonably hope to possess in this world. While the religious man keeps his end constantly in view, that he may not be taken by surprize, his pursuits are regulated with as much calmness and resolution as if he knew the exact number of his days and the manner of their termination. Still there is even to him such an awful gloom spread over the limit of his horizon, that he cannot absolutely divest himself of all fear, as he feels himself approaching the boundless ocean of eternity. The present life he is well acquainted with; he is sensible of its imperfections, and thoroughly persuaded that this very perception is an indication to him of another and better state, with which the knowledge and virtue, the powers and pleasures of this state, can stand no comparison. It may be matter of wonder, then, that such a person should be depressed in spirits, when the ministerial warning of Providence addresses him in language similar to that of the prophet to the pious king of Judah, "Set thine house in order, for thou shalt die and not live." That they, who, from their experience of the vanity of time, have been careful to lay up treasures in heaven, should use every means to prolong their stay on earth, seems very unaccountable in the opinion of superficial observers, who being without correct ideas of man's obligations here, take little thought about what is to befall him hereafter. Hezekiah, when he received the awful annunciation of death, was deeply afflicted, and prayed earnestly for a protraction of the sentence. Yet this good king was not to learn that mortality was the inevitable lot of all men; and the reflection upon his life gave him good ground of comfort with respect to the great change which sooner or later he was aware must take place. How then can the despondency of Hezekiah be reconciled with the strength of his faith, or his anxiety to live a few years longer in

this troublesome and sinful world, be justified on the grounds of rational piety? The most complete answer will be found in the situation of this excellent person, and the particular circumstances in which he was now involved. He had already done much in the work of national reformation; but more still remained to be executed, and he was fearful that if he should be cut off in the midst of his labours, the cause of religion would suffer, and the morals of the people be injured. The character of the succeeding reign is sufficient to warrant this conjecture; but that the concern of Hezekiah was of a public nature, is evident from the very words of his complaint, the state of his kingdom at this time, and the promise given him: "Thus saith the Lord, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will heal thee; on the third day thou shalt go up unto the house of the Lord. And I will add unto thy days fifteen years, and I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake."

It is plain from this, that Judah was still exposed to the threatened fury of its most inveterate enemy; and the narrative shows the weakness of its state at this time; even under the government of a wise and religious prince. Hezekiah, therefore, felt a parental tenderness for his people, and a becoming solicitude to be instrumental in their deliverance. This it was which made him weep when commanded to prepare for death, and this induced him to be so urgent for a sign of his recovery. His life was not only prolonged, but the extraordinary information was given him, that it should be for fifteen years, which declaration was confirmed by the retrocession of the sun's shadow ten degrees upon the dial of Ahaz; so that it became a matter of general observation and of national record. This case, then, of Hezekiah,

was altogether of a peculiar nature, and had more in it of a public than a private concern; being calculated to inspire the people with confidence in their Divine Protector, and with sentiments of grateful affection to their benevolent monarch. But, singular as the case might be, it teaches us, nevertheless, the duty of taking every possible care of our own lives, as well as of others, that we may do all the good that lies in our power, before the night of death cometh, in which no man can work. The means used by the prophet for the recovery of the afflicted king, is also an instructive lesson to the same purpose; for when the cure might have been effected by a word, it was performed by an application, to show the necessity of our using all those blessings which God hath created for the prolongation of life and the restoration of health. "The Lord hath created medicines out of the earth; and he that is wise will not abhor them." Eccclus. xxxviii. 4.

JUNE THE FIFTH.

THE CHARACTER OF MANASSEH.

2 Kings, xxi. 16.—*Moreover, Manasseh shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another, besides his sins wherewith he made Judah to sin in doing that which was evil in the sight of the Lord.*

THOUGH a religious education, even when aided by the advantages of pious example, hath not always the desired effects, answerable to the labours and prayers of parents, yet the culture so carefully bestowed will hardly fail to produce some benefit at one period of life or another. It is very distressing to see the instructions of wisdom rejected, and the counsels of

benevolence despised by those who are called to the discharge of very solemn duties, the obligation of which has apparently made little, if any, impression on their minds. But to whatever ill use the impetuosity of youth may turn the attentions of their early benefactors, it is almost impossible that the remembrance of these monitions can be utterly effaced from the mind. Though for a time, perhaps, they may be recollected only to be contemned, yet if the riot of folly is succeeded by the hour of reflection, these neglected seeds, being watered with the tears of penitence, may spring up and bring forth fruit to eternal life. From the history of Manasseh we may derive encouragement to proceed in that good work which has for its object the present improvement and future welfare of the rising generation; leaving the issue to Him who hath given this promise to his church, "They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth in trouble: for they are the seed of the blessed of the Lord, and their offspring with them." Isa. lxxv. 23. That so zealous a prince as Hezekiah failed in any part of his parental duty, cannot be supposed for a moment, when we consider how careful he was of the morals of his people, and anxious to remove from their view every occasion of offence. He knew, besides, the number of his years; and as that gracious information was the reward of his piety, he would of course profit by it to the uttermost, in promoting the national welfare, and his own edification. Among other matters of primary importance, the character of his successor must have been one that called for his constant regard and active exertion. Hezekiah would not leave the mind of his son to the management of debauched courtiers, and men of loose notions, but watch over it from the dawning of reason with the most sedulous attention, and during its progress guard every avenue from the contamination of vice, by the lessons of practical virtue and religion.

That excellent monarch was indeed called away to a crown of righteousness, when the heir to his throne was no more than twelve years old; but even at that early age much may be done in laying the groundwork of useful knowledge; and one so ardent as Hezekiah in the cause of truth would do all that lay in his power to perpetuate the reformation which he had begun, by infusing the same spirit into his children. Unfortunately, however, the abundant riches and prosperity which distinguished this reign increased the national vanity to such a pitch, that the amiable disposition and exemplary deportment of the monarch were insufficient to stem the torrent of corruption that rolled over the land. The accession of Manasseh to so splendid an inheritance was therefore a great trial to an inexperienced youth, surrounded by flatterers, and continually exposed to the allurements of pleasure. He was very soon drawn aside from the paths of uprightness in which paternal piety had been so careful to fix his footsteps: and so rapid was his progress in the career of iniquity, that he exceeded all the wicked princes, not only of his own house, but even of the neighbouring nations. The picture of his enormities is a frightful one; for though it is sketched only in general terms, enough appears to show that idolatry and debauchery, violence and cruelty, were the prominent features of this evil reign. Manasseh was not satisfied with restoring the high places and idols which his father had removed; but, as if it had been his wish to cover the memory of Hezekiah with odium, he impiously built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the Lord. Having renounced his religion, it was but natural for him to sink into immoral practices; and the more he addicted himself to superstition, his temper became gloomy and vindictive, so that he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood. Like all apostates from the faith, this unhappy king was a bitter persecutor of righteousness, and of those

ministers, who, faithful to their trust, were assiduous in their labours among the people, which provoked Manasseh to commit greater outrages than did the nations whom the Lord destroyed before the children of Israel. As his father took great pains to establish his child in the way of holiness, Manasseh, in wanton contempt and profanation of the Divine institutions, made his son go through the fire of Moloch; which ceremony was a kind of initiatory rite, devoting those who so passed over the altar to the service of the idol there worshipped. Such was the character of this degenerate prince, who was permitted to run on in his wicked course many years, multiplying abominations to an unparalleled degree, and resisting innumerable warnings which the Lord sent by his prophets. When, therefore, Manasseh was made prisoner, and carried away to Babylon, it would seem as if the Divine judgment had overtaken him in vengeance for his crimes. But it was in fact the visitation of mercy; and in his exile the instructions which he had received in his youth became the means of awakening his mind, and leading him to a deep and thorough repentance. "In his affliction he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto him; and he was entreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord he was God." 2 Chron. xxxiii. 12, 13. This restoration of a grievous sinner to the Divine favour happened at an advanced period of life; but the sincerity of his penitence was fully manifested by the humility of his behaviour, and the zeal which he displayed in purging out the corruptions introduced by his authority. Encouraged by such a monument of grace, we are taught to hope favourably even of the worst of sinners, and "to be stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as we know that our labour is not in vain in the Lord." 1 Cor. xv. 58.

JUNE THE SIXTH.

THE PIETY OF JOSIAH.

2 Kings, xxiii. 25.—*Like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him.*

EARLY piety is always beautiful, but it is still more admirable when the young disciple takes up the cross in opposition to powerful temptations, and the seductive influence of example. We have seen a prince destroying all the noble works of his religious parent, trampling with sacrilegious fury upon the Divine institutions, and persecuting with savage violence the prophets and ministers of the Most High. But our attention is now called to one of an opposite character, who in his tender years discovered an ardent affection to truth, and a zealous concern for the laws of his God, in the midst of corruption and idolatry, which had greatly increased under the evil government of his father. From his infancy Josiah "walked in the ways of David, and declined neither to the right hand nor to the left:" an extraordinary encomium, which, however, was fully justified by his conduct; for, on arriving at the age of maturity, "he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem, the high places, and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images."

The first step taken by him in this work of reformation was to repair the house of the Lord, for which he spared no expense, but distributed to his faithful servants money without reckoning, that the desired object might be adequate to his wishes, and redound to the Divine glory. In the progress of this undertaking the book of the law was found in its per-

fect state; and the astonishment expressed by the king at hearing the contents, plainly shows the degenerate state to which Judah was reduced; for though it cannot be supposed that Josiah was entirely ignorant of the Scriptures, he certainly was not acquainted with the whole of them: and this discovery of the ancient record proves that not only himself, but even the high priest, was a stranger to the writings of Moses. The reading of the statutes, and the denunciations by which they were sanctioned, had such an effect upon the mind of the young king, that while he rent his clothes in testimony of his grief at the national delinquency, he immediately adopted such measures as were best adapted to remedy the existing evil, and to avert the impending judgments. After consulting the Divine direction, Josiah assembled the people to hear the word of God, that by knowing the history of his gracious dealings towards their fathers, and the laws which he had enacted for the government of them and their children, it might be generally seen what were the causes of the calamities which had already fallen upon one part of the chosen family, and what naturally must be expected by those who remained, if they continued also without repentance. This prudent prince did not require the nation to enter into a covenant, or to bind themselves under the obligation of a rule, without being thoroughly informed of the origin and authority of that code which was now to be revived. He wisely studied the sacred volume himself, and had it explained by those who were most competent to the task, before he caused the whole to be read for the public instruction. The word of God being thus restored, and made the rule of reform, that important concern went on with vigour under the immediate inspection of the sovereign. But the zeal of Josiah, though it produced an external change throughout Judah, could not purge out the corruptions which defiled the hearts of the people. They

did not, indeed, resist the efforts of their king in behalf of the true religion; but they did not co-operate sincerely with him in the work of conversion. Notwithstanding their ready compliance with the established order, their principles and manners continued without any amendment; and though they were in the habit of making their boast of the temple of the Lord, they turned it into a den of thieves by the foulest abominations. Such is the description which the Almighty gave of them by Jereniah, who prophesied at this very time; "When," says he, "I had fed them to the full, they then committed adultery, and assembled themselves by troops in the harlots' houses. They were as fed horses in the morning: every one neighed after his neighbour's wife. Shall I not visit for these things? saith the Lord; and shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?" Chap. v. 7—9. This picture of depravity will explain what occurs in the history, where, after delineating the exalted character of the pious monarch, the sacred writer adds, "Notwithstanding the Lord turned not from the fierceness of his great wrath wherewith his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations that Manasseh had provoked him withal." Much as Josiah did in a short time, and all that could be done, was performed by him for the benefit of the family over which he was placed; yet the poisonous weeds of vice could not be eradicated, even by his diligence and example. The first judgment then which fell upon this sinful nation was the untimely loss of their excellent king; by whose death the threatened punishment was hastened, and "the Lord removed Judah out of the land, as he had removed Israel." Josiah did indeed fall in battle, but then he saw not the miseries which were destined to scourge the iniquities of his people; and thus was he mercifully taken away from the evil to come, while his memory, as an apocryphal writer expresseth it, "is as

the composition of a perfume ; sweet as honey in all mouths, and as musick at a banquet of wine." *Wisd.* xlix. 1.

JUNE THE SEVENTH.

THE CAPTIVITY OF JUDAH.

2 Kings, xxv. 21.—*So Judah was carried away out of their land.*

THAT national sins are productive of national misery, will be admitted by all who have not utterly cast off the persuasion that "there is a God who judgeth in the earth." *Psalm lviii. 11.* Even the philosopher who sets revelation aside, and by the light of political wisdom alone endeavours to explore the rise and fall of empires, is obliged to confess that obliquity of principles and depravity of manners obviously tend to change the condition of states, and to accelerate their ruin. But, after all, human life is so contracted, the means of information are so few and imperfect, and the prejudices of men are so powerful, that the profoundest intellect is incapable of gaining a distinct and comprehensive view of the Divine dispensations in the government of the moral world. All that we can discover is, that the principal revolutions in human affairs are usually brought about by the most unlikely causes, and in such seasons and under such circumstances as show that there is some secret agency concerned, which baffles the foresight of the skilful, and enervates the strength of the mighty, outruns in a moment the labour of years, and confounds, by an unexpected stroke, the combinations of the wise; saying, as it were in the midst of all opposition, "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure." The sacred history alone clears up all the perplexities which can

embarrass the inquirer in his observations on mankind, and explains the reasons why societies flourish long, notwithstanding their impiety, till at length they give way to the overwhelming domination of a power, perhaps even more wicked than themselves. The dealings of the Almighty with the children of Israel were intended to exhibit an outline of the Divine economy, both of providence and grace. From the time that a separation took place between Israel and Judah, we may discern the preparations for that general dispersion which afterwards occurred, to fulfil the secret decrees of God in judgment and mercy. Israel, by withdrawing from the house and lineage of David, did, in fact, renounce the inheritance and the promise which had all along formed the peculiar glory of Jacob's posterity. The separated tribes sunk into the grossest abominations, and at last they were carried away into other lands, where, instead of repenting their misdeeds, and "humbling themselves under the hand of Him that smote them, they hardened their necks like to the necks of their fathers that did not believe in the Lord their God." Chap. xvii. 14. But Judah remained yet longer in the possession of its religious and civil privileges; receiving "line upon line, and precept upon precept," by the hands of messengers raised up and sent to this people at various times, proclaiming the overture of pardon and peace to the penitent, and denouncing the vengeance of Heaven upon the obdurate and unbelieving. All these acts of kindness, however, were abused, the invitations were despised, and the bearers of them persecuted, while the long-suffering goodness of God served only to harden the hearts of this infatuated nation, and the judgments which had fallen upon their brethren of the other tribes failed to awaken them to a sense of their ingratitude and danger. The accomplishment of the Divine predictions did not rouse their attention to the still more awful ones which remained to

be fulfilled ; nor did the signs of the times, even when the rolling of the approaching storm might be heard, make any impression upon their minds. This is the picture drawn of Judah by the pencil of a prophet who ministered in this stage of its declension. "The just Lord is in the midst thereof : he will not do iniquity : every morning doth he bring his judgment to light, he faileth not ; but the unjust knoweth no shame. I have cut off the nations ; their towers are desolate ; I made their streets waste, that none passeth by : their cities are destroyed, so that there is no man, that there is none inhabitant." All this was descriptive of the state of Israel, and which might have taught the sister kingdom what she had to expect by persisting in following a similar course : but, as the Divine speaker observes, "I said, Surely thou Judah wilt fear me ; thou wilt receive instruction ; so their dwelling should not be cut off, howsoever I punished them : but they rose early, and corrupted all their doings." Zeph. iii. 5—7. After the death of the good Josiah, a turbulent spirit prevailed among this people, which, with their other enormities, exposed them to the incursions of the neighbouring powers, till Zedekiah by his want of faith, and breaking the oath of fealty which he had taken to Nebuchadnezzar, completed the ruin of his country ; "and Judah also was carried away out of their land." If we examine carefully the character of this branch of God's family as delineated by those who were eye-witnesses of its fall, we shall find that the corruption was not partial, but general, amidst a splendour of prophetic light which rendered every member of the state that neglected to profit by it, without excuse. It was not the degeneracy of the great, or the negligence of the priesthood, that brought the stream of desolation upon the land, but a mixture of all the vices that could debauch the morals and defile the lives of men, particularly pride and luxury in the higher ranks, and an utter disregard

of virtue and religion among all orders and descriptions of the community. And it is by a similar confluence of evils, that flourishing kingdoms work their own decay in every age: for when any state arrives at such a pitch, that each member thinks he has a right to do what is good in his own eyes, without any regard to the national character and welfare, the seeds of destruction are sown; and in proportion as this laxity of sentiment prevails, the internal strength of the country will be weakened, till it becomes a prey to foreign rule or intestine commotion. Let us then remember, and apply to ourselves for the regulation of our conduct, the Wise Man's maxim; "Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach unto any people." Prov. xiv. 34.

JUNE THE EIGHTH.

THE DECREE OF CYRUS.

Ezra, i. 2.—Thus saith Cyrus, king of Persia, The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.

THE feeling mind, in the contemplation of the moral world, is often perplexed by that confusion of vices and virtues, joys and sufferings, which almost indicates the want of some steady and uniform plan in the distribution of causes, or implies an uncertainty in the effects. Shortsighted man is apt to be impatient when he beholds the progress of ambition over depopulated countries, and his murmuring spirit will turn from the dismal spectacle to vent his complaints in some such language as that of the mourning pro-

phet: "Wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?" Hab. i. 13. The captivity of Judah by the great tyrant of the East, was a subject of bitter lamentation, even to those pious men who were compelled by the influence of the Spirit to denounce repeatedly, and in various forms, that dreadful calamity to their country. Yet amidst this sorrow they knew that the word delivered by them came from Him whose ways are righteous, though terrible, and who in the midst of judgment remembereth mercy. While, therefore, they wept over the ruins of their parent land, and sympathized with the sufferers, who groaned under the yoke of bondage, they could look forward with confidence to the end of these troubles, and thus the submission of faith sanctified the affliction. They knew that however tremendous the power of the oppressor might be, it was limited, and that the period of its termination was fixed by the Sovereign of the universe, who in the voice of prophecy said to the despot of Babylon, "Thou art my battle-axe and weapons of war; for with thee will I break in pieces the nations, and with thee will I destroy kingdoms." Jerem. li. 20. In the midst of the distress with which they were surrounded, and the cares which pressed upon them, it was an inestimable consolation that they were permitted to keep the sabbath; and that, with few exceptions, they sustained no persecution from their heathen masters on account of their peculiar manners and religious customs. It was indeed a part of the Divine will concerning this people, that while they were sifted among other nations as a punishment for their iniquities, they should be the means of preparing the way of the Gentiles, by making known those prophecies which marked their own condition, and described that salvation which from them should spread over

all the earth. They were thus sown in mercy to themselves and others, that the promise might become matter of inquiry with strangers, in the accomplishment of that Divine declaration, "I will say to them which were not my people, 'Thou art my people; and they shall say, 'Thou art my God.'" Hos. ii. 23. It is a point of no small importance in the history of these captives, as connected with the Divine predictions concerning them, that the first fruits of the dispensation should have been literally mentioned above one hundred years before the transplantation of them to Babylon; and that the royal mandate, giving them permission to return to their own land, should contain the most explicit confession of faith in the true God. Now we find Isaiah calling the conqueror of Babylon by his name, and describing the manner of his achieving that enterprise, a long time before the event, and while that great empire was yet towering far above all the eastern powers. "Thus saith the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him, and I will loose the loins of kings; to open before him the two-leaved gates, and the gates shall not be shut; I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron: and I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I the Lord, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel. For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me." Isaiah, xlv. 1—4. When Cyrus made himself master of Babylon, by turning the course of the river Euphrates, and entering the city at a time of general security, the prophetic writings must naturally have become the subject of converse and veneration to those who were

possessed of them, or had any knowledge of their contents. But whether the report of these wonderful predictions reached the ears of the king, and thus excited his curiosity, is not clear, though it is asserted by one historian that Cyrus had read this very call and description given so long before by Isaiah, and that "on the perusal of these divine compositions, he resolved to perform what was declared in them, which occasioned this edict." Josephus, *Antiq. b. i. ch. i.* What authority this respectable writer may have had for the relation he has given, does not appear; but the royal decree itself, certainly implies a more direct revelation to this august personage than that contained in the written prophecy. This ancient document might indeed awaken a desire for more information in the mind of so intelligent and inquisitive a person as Cyrus; and by that means the other prophecies, particularly of Jeremiah, would become known to him. Still there is one very essential point in the proclamation, which could not have been drawn from any of them, and that is the confession made by the king, that "Jehovah had charged him to build a temple at Jerusalem." Now Cyrus speaks here of an immediate communication which he had received from the Lord God of Israel, for this great purpose; and he proceeds to perform the injunction in a spirit of obedience and faith that plainly proves his conversion. In another part of Isaiah's predictions, this great victor and deliverer is delineated in a manner which exactly agrees with the particulars of his birth and conquests; but what is most observable is the declaration that he should believe in, and openly confess, the true God. "I have raised up one from the north, and he shall come: from the rising of the sun shall he call upon my name; and he shall come upon princes as upon mortar, and as the potter treadeth clay." Isaiah, xli. 25. The most glorious part of this description was certainly fulfilled

when Cyrus issued this very edict, in which he repeatedly professed his faith in the true God, the Maker of heaven and earth, and confessed the sole Divinity of Him, whose precept he deemed it his highest honour to execute. But there was yet more in all this; for as the Messiah was represented to Israel in the person and actions of David, so that glorious Person was typically figured to the Gentiles in the splendour and beneficence of Cyrus. This great potentate, who overturned the Babylonian empire, and re-established the two tribes of God's inheritance, at the Divine command, is expressly denominated the anointed of Jehovah; an appellation which, in prophetic language, always denotes either the Messiah in person, or his proxy. One effect of this mighty conquest, performed by the Median warrior, was the blow given to idolatry in the destruction of the famous oracle of Nebo, and the removal of the numerous images from Babylon, as so much lumber, by the common soldiers of the victorious army, which had been thus foretold by the prophet: "Bel boweth down, Nebo stoopeth, their idols were upon the beasts and upon the cattle: your carriages were heavy laden; they are a burden to the weary beast. They stoop, they bow down together: they could not deliver the burden, but themselves are gone into captivity." Is. xlv. 1, 2. Thus did Cyrus on two accounts aptly figure the spiritual Conqueror and righteous King, who buildeth the temple of the Lord, even the church of the living God; which glorious work is prepared and carried on under his government by the zeal of his servants, in "casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God; and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." 2 Cor. x. 5.

JUNE THE NINTH.

THE PIETY OF NEHEMIAH.

Nehemiah, ii. 12.—*And I arose in the night, I and some few men with me; neither told I any man what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem.*

THE history of the chosen people, under every dispensation, affords various important lessons for the strengthening of our faith and the regulation of our conduct; for while we perceive a supernatural agency displayed in the fulfillment of the Divine decrees, we see it operating also by the instrumentality of second causes, and making the motives of man subservient to the purposes of God. Thus are we encouraged by these Sacred Records to use our utmost endeavours in the cause of righteousness, the good of our country, and the advancement of the church; relying for success upon His goodness who hath said, "Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruning-hooks into spears; let the weak say, I am strong." Joel, iii. 10: In the character and conduct of Nehemiah we have an admirable model for our imitation, showing us what may be done by individual exertions when the heart is rightly set towards God, and the cause of reformation is properly undertaken. Much as had been done by virtue of the decree of Cyrus for the restoration of Jerusalem, the work went on but slowly, owing partly to the opposition which it received from the settlers who had been fixed in the land after the captivity, and not a little to the corruptions which prevailed among the Jews themselves. The house of God indeed being rebuilt, divine service was duly performed; but the city remained in a dismantled state, so that the inhabitants were continually exposed to danger, and the holy edifice to

profanation. When the intelligence came to the ears of Nehemiah, who resided with great distinction in the court of Persia, the good man was filled with grief, and poured out his prayers at the throne of grace in behalf of his countrymen in their native land. This true patriot fasted and wept in the palace of Shushan, on being informed that the city of his fathers lay open to the incursions of its enemies; though he had himself no other interest in the place than what arose from the pure benevolence of his own feeling heart. What were the walls of Jerusalem to the cup-bearer of Artaxerxes, and why should he be concerned about a people, who to all appearance were either indifferent to their own interests, or so mean and poor as to be incapable of repairing and defending their city? The mere politician would have been shy of acknowledging his connexion with such a depressed community; and, too mindful of his personal ease to think of making great sacrifices for the sake of his friends in a distant country, such an one would have confined his duty within the circle of present advantage, and regulated his actions solely by the principle of worldly prudence. Pity is the utmost that a person of this character will express for those who need his assistance; unless, by giving them relief, he can enhance his own reputation and strengthen the weight of his influence. Good Nehemiah formed no calculations of this kind, but the moment he found that Zion languished, and the city of the great King lay waste, all his power and wealth, his pleasure and consequence, became shadows in his estimation, while the widowed city, once the joy of the earth, seemed thus to address all her children, "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger?" Lam. i. 12. But grieved as Nehemiah was for the wretched

condition of Judea, he did not waste his time in unavailing complaints, or sink into a state of sullen apathy. He fasted and prayed, it is true, but it was in private, where he humbled himself with as much penitential devotion as if he had dwelt among the ruins of Jerusalem, and had a personal concern in all her calamities. Still his affliction did not prevent him from attending to the duties of his station, nor was he desirous of gaining credit for his sympathy and tenderness towards his distressed countrymen. Having laid the object of his anxious solicitude before the Sovereign Disposer of all events, he was content to wait till some favourable opportunity might occur when his services could be rendered with effect to the cause which lay nearest to his heart. But the shade of sorrow which overcast his countenance, could not escape the observation of his royal master, who perceiving that something unusually heavy lay upon the mind of his servant, demanded an explanation. Nehemiah startled at this discovery of his melancholy, which he had attempted to conceal by his assiduity; but he was too conscientious to deceive the king by an evasion of the truth, which he thus pathetically expressed; "Why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burnt with fire?" The monarch, touched with this complaint, attended to the request of Nehemiah, who not only received permission to visit Judea, but obtained also mandatory letters to the governors of the provinces and the keeper of the forest, to furnish him with materials for the building. On his arrival at Jerusalem this prudent man did not, as many would have done, make a parade of his consequence by convening the people and opening his commission; but he tarried there three days, to make all the observations that were necessary before he began his great undertaking. To avoid all appearance of

ostentation on his part, and to prevent any attempts that might be made to frustrate his plans, he entered upon a nightly survey of the city; on completing which, he assembled the rulers of the place and said, "Ye see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burnt with fire: come and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach." Having thus pressed upon the minds of the chiefs the duty which belonged to them, he produced for their encouragement the powers with which he was invested, or, to use the language of his own interesting narrative, "Then I told them of the hand of my God, which was good upon me; as also the king's words that he had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work."

Here we see the precise character of pure patriotism, disinterested benevolence, and fervent zeal, all resulting from the love of God, and proceeding in a complete renunciation of selfish views and conduct, with that cautious spirit which weighs and examines its means before it embarks in any important concern. When once, however, it has clearly ascertained the Divine will, and adjusted all things conformably to the principles of truth, it goes fearlessly on, relying for success upon Him who in directing and supporting the builders of Jerusalem, said to them by the mouth of his prophet, "This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts. Who art thou, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the head stone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it." Zech. iv. 6, 7.

JUNE THE TENTH.

THE PRAYER OF NEHEMIAH.

Nehem. xiii. 14.—Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and wipe not out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God, and for the offices thereof.

It may be considered as somewhat unaccountable, that the humble and devout Nehemiah, after showing such a spirit of self-denial at the court of Persia, and undergoing so much labour without ostentation, at Jerusalem, should in this earnest manner pray to have his good deeds registered as it were in heaven. The Divine Instructor of man hath established this rule for the regulation of our temper and conduct in the service of religion; "When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do." Luke, xvii. 10. But it may be asked, how is the desire of the modest and pious Nehemiah reconcileable with this dictate of unerring wisdom, which, though it forms an essential principle in the evangelical system, was by no means unknown to the church of old; since from the earliest days it was admitted as a fundamental maxim by those who professed the truth, that "man cannot be profitable unto God, as he that is wise may be profitable unto himself." Job, xxii. 2. Yet so it is, that we find Nehemiah, on more occasions than one, offering up his prayers to the Throne of Grace, in similar terms to this petition, "Think upon me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people."

This excellent man had certainly performed many great things for the benefit of the holy city, and particularly for the temple and its ministers; he had

also succeeded in defeating a formidable conspiracy raised against the work in which he was engaged; and above all, by his prudence and zeal, he had effected that national reformation, without which all industry and valour, patriotism and charity, would have been in vain, and the services of religion no more than a solemn mockery of Heaven. Now, as it was natural for such a man to feel much anxiety during the progress of this great concern, so he could not fail to be thankful when any obstacle was graciously removed, and an advancement made in this work and labour of love, upon which his heart was so intently fixed. Nehemiah called the benevolent offices which he had been enabled to perform, good deeds, because they derived all their value from the Author of every perfect gift, and were devoted exclusively to his glory and the service of his chosen people. Far from assuming any merit to himself, Nehemiah acknowledged that he was merely an instrument in the good hand of his God, without whose guidance and support nothing could have been done either by his own interest or the combined efforts of all his countrymen. This indefatigable servant of the Most High deemed it his greatest honour to be employed in the restoration of Jerusalem. Though it would be unattended with any temporal remuneration, he breathed out his most ardent desires continually for the prosperity of the work, and he rejoiced as it proceeded to a successful termination; but knowing what were the causes which led to the former ruin of the place, he prayed for a permanent blessing upon the present building, and the continuance of those good deeds, in which, by the Divine grace, he had the principal share. For himself, Nehemiah had no idea of reward, because he was sensible, that however faithfully he might have acted throughout this arduous business, it was "God who worked in and by him, both to will and to do of his good pleasure."

Phil. ii. 13. That he entertained no vain thoughts of his designs and actions, or presumed to ascribe any merit to them, as far as he was concerned, is evident from the supplication offered up by him after settling the portions of the ministers of religion, and reforming the temple: "Remember me, O my God, concerning this also, and spare me according to the greatness of thy mercy." Here then we see this righteous man casting himself and all his works, even the most exalted of them, wholly upon the Divine benignity; and even praying that he might be the spared monument of mercy, after having been in so eminent a manner instrumental in promoting the glory of God, and the service of pure and undefiled religion. From this instance we may learn, that though there is an encouragement in remembering our good works, as by so doing we derive consolation, and are stimulated to perseverance; yet is there nothing in the best of them that can render us at all acceptable in the sight of God. They do indeed afford to us certain marks and evidences that we are his children; but however worthily they may be performed, still are the most excellent of them weak and imperfect, when opposed to our many deficiencies, and balanced against our innumerable obligations, the sense of which should make us, like the humble and pious Nehemiah, pray for the prosperity of our good deeds; at the same time laying both them and ourselves at the footstool of God's grace, and desiring to be spared according to the greatness of his mercy. While we are thankful for that grace which has enabled us to serve him faithfully, let us remember that "we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained, that we should walk in them." Eph. ii. 10.

JUNE THE ELEVENTH.

ESTHER AND MORDECAI.

Esther, iv. 14 — *If thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place ; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed : and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this ?*

IF man would examine events with steady attention, and compare them with an unbiassed judgment, he might discern numerous instances where the deepest sagacity could not have chosen equal instruments to bring about great purposes with those which genius has overlooked and pride rejected. This then is one among the many instructions which we derive from revelation, that it lays open the secret operations of Providence, and shows the interior of that vast machine, whose complicated movements not only astonish the ignorant but confound the wise, alarm the fears of the virtuous and perplex the speculations of the greatest adepts in political science. Here we perceive the Divine goodness operating in the midst of partial evils, and bringing order out of confusion ; rendering the sufferings of one class beneficial to themselves and others ; while the machinations of the wicked become the means of facilitating what they were intended to destroy. The deliverance of the Jewish people from the diabolical plan laid for their extirpation, affords a remarkable illustration of this important truth ; and, what is very observable, the whole history is so natural, that while we wonder at the evident but secret agency of Divine power and wisdom throughout the whole concern, there is no miraculous interposition visible in any part. That an eastern monarch should put away his queen, and that

he should select a fair Jewess from among the many maidens who were brought before him to supply her place, cannot be considered as at all extraordinary; but when we are told that at this time Ahasuerus had for a prime minister the descendant of one of those nations who were rooted enemies to the Hebrew people, we begin to perceive the gracious disposition of Providence in adapting proper instruments, by common occurrences, to circumstances where they may best promote good and counteract evil. When Esther was raised to the royal dignity, by the advice of her prudent uncle she kept her promotion concealed from her countrymen, who were dispersed throughout the Persian dominions. This precaution was a wise measure, because the origin of this damsel might have prejudiced many against her in the palace, through the artifices of Haman, who had too great an influence over the mind of his indolent master. Mordecai, the benevolent friend and pious instructor of this interesting young woman, was well aware of the dangerous situation in which she now stood; and he justly thought that if her elevation became generally known to the Jews, it might produce so much joy and unreasonable expectation among them as to attract the notice and excite the jealousy of their adversaries. Mordecai was not ignorant of the feeble tenure by which the favour of princes was held; he therefore generously resolved, that whatever misfortune might befall his kinswoman, the captive people should be no sufferers on her account. But the contrivances of man are frequently the occasion of that very trouble they were intended to avert; and so it happened in the present instance; for Mordecai having discovered a conspiracy against the king's life, was an object of notice, and probably of envy, to the courtiers; who sought his ruin and their own interest, by making an evil report of his behaviour to the haughty Haman. When this unprincipled favourite

found how contemptuously he had been treated by a Jew, his malignant soul immediately formed the design of extirpating the whole family of Israel, because one of their countrymen had refused to do him reverence. The influence which he had with the king enabled him to take the foul advantage of that favour, in a moment of hilarity; to obtain a decree by which the Jews throughout the empire were doomed to death at an appointed time. Mordecai, rightly tracing this horrible design to the offence which he had given to the minister, rent his clothes, put on sackcloth, and covered himself with ashes; in which garb of mourning he stood before the gate of the palace. No remarkable an appearance could not fail to draw the attention and to alarm the apprehensions of the queen, who sent her chamberlain to know the reason of this extraordinary behaviour. Among other remarkable statutes of this ancient state was one which, upon the present occasion, obviously seemed to render the ruin of the devoted people inevitable. By a cautious policy of the Persian law, no one, however high in office or near in relation, could approach the person of the sovereign without being expressly called for that purpose. The queen herself was not exempted from this rigid rule, the violation of which was instant death, unless the imperial sceptre announced pardon to the offender. It was now thirty days since Esther had been invited to the royal presence; and this circumstance, with the law and its consequences, she caused to be imparted without delay to the weeping Mordecai. The good man was no stranger to the constitution of the country where he resided, and to its stern decisions; but the time was limited, the necessity of the case was urgent, and nothing remained to be done but to choose between the personal hazard of one life, and the possibility of saving many thousands. Much as Mordecai felt for the child of his affections, whom

he had so tenderly brought up, he had yet a deeper concern for the whole body of his afflicted nation, now doomed to destruction on his account. Still in the midst of his agitation and sorrow he was not without a glimpse of hope, which, together with the lesson of duty, he imparted also for the direction and consolation of Esther: "If thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed; and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" Such a pious sentiment, resulting from faith in God's superintending care of his inheritance, was well calculated to lead the mind of the queen to take that course which it became her to adopt in this perilous exigency. Mordecai had full reliance upon the promise by which the seed of Jacob were assured that no weapon formed for their destruction should prosper; but that when they were completely sifted, the remnant should "return and worship the Lord in his holy mountain." Is. xxvii. 13. In what way, and by what means, the deliverance would come, this true believer left to be determined by the event; but he judiciously considered that the wonderful advancement of Esther was an indication, at least, that she had some imperious duty to discharge in a season of peculiar peril and difficulty. The queen submissively received the word of admonition, and having prepared herself for the important work of mediation by fasting and prayer, she soon experienced the fullness of that gracious declaration, "Delight thyself also in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass." Ps. xxxvii. 4, 5.

JUNE THE TWELFTH.

HAMAN AND MORDECAI.

Esther, v. 13.—Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate.

WE have just been admiring the fervent piety of an illustrious believer, when on the very brink of ruin ; and we have contemplated with equal pleasure the meek demeanour of an exalted woman, relinquishing the ease and splendour of a throne to live or die with the persecuted church of God. Our attention is now called to a very different object ; to one of that malevolent order of beings whose perturbed spirit is thus forcibly described in the Word of Truth : “ The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt.” Is. lvii. 20. Covered with honours, and surrounded with all that could gratify the thirst for riches or the lust of pleasure, Haman was unhappy because there was one person in the kingdom who neither regarded him with admiration nor courted his favour. But what had Mordecai done to poison the mind of this haughty minister, and to render him miserable in the midst of his wealth, luxury, and titles ? or in what situation did this hated object move, that Haman could not behold him without being so sick at heart at the meridian of his glory, as to confess in the circle of his friends, “ Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate ? ” All the injury this statesman had received was merely ideal. Amidst the crowds who did him homage as he passed in and out, during his attendance upon the king, there was one man who paid no respect to him ; and this was reported to Haman by some officious sycophants, who took

care to inform him at the same time that the man was a Jew.

As Haman had no knowledge of Mordecai till this intelligence was communicated to him, it seems evident that this pious descendant of Abraham occupied no place of public distinction at the court of Ahasuerus, nor even at the gate of the palace; otherwise both his person and want of attention would hardly have escaped the observation of the minister himself. Till now Haman had been in the habit of going to the royal audience without being at all affected by any of the surrounding objects, but received the incense which was offered him in proud satisfaction, as if it were really the tribute of gratitude due to his exalted virtue. No sooner, however, did he learn that one man was loftier in spirit than himself, and that this person was a branch of that despised race, against which he had an hereditary hatred, than all his consequence was blighted, and he never could take his usual progress without observing and fancying that he had an enemy in this Mordecai, who sat in the king's gate. Haman adopted no measures to become acquainted with the character and connexions of this poor man; but judging, from his own base motives and disposition, that he must be actuated by some evil intention in declining to pay the accustomed obeisance, he constantly eyed Mordecai with the malignant dread of a mind conscious of guilt, as he passed through the king's gate. Here then were two men in situations almost as remote as could possibly be from each other; the one occupying the first office in a mighty empire, enjoying the full blaze of royal favour, possessed of immense riches, and living, as it should seem, in the enjoyment of every blessing that could render him happy in the bosom of domestic endearment, and enlivened with the delights of friendship. On the other hand, here stood a destitute captive,

contemned by the great, and earning his daily bread, most probably, in some employment which exposed him continually to the jealousy of those who disliked him on account of his nation, and hated him more for his integrity. But while this despised Jew derived comfort from his religion, and kept the promotion of Esther a secret, even from her kindred, Haman was miserable; and though he made a parade of his wealth and honours, "Nought is all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate." It is not nothing in the circumstance of the elevation of the hated object, that could excite the rage of one who was raised by the partiality of his master above all the princes of Persia; but the confession of Haman exhibits a faithful picture of the human heart, when it becomes the seat of insatiate ambition and inveterate malice. This man wanted for nothing to complete his worldly felicity, and he had no rival from whose ascendancy he could entertain any apprehensions of danger. But Mordecai refused to bow before him, and that evidently to him was the scruple; which was enough to excite his rage, and the honours of this minion, who had the sentiments of piety himself, knew not how to suspect that virtue in other men. That Mordecai slighted him, was sufficient to mortify his pride, and to provoke his anger; but as the insult came from a Jew, to whose principles the superstitious Haman had an implacable aversion, his mind could take no rest so long as the man lived to offend him by an imaginary injury. Gladly, therefore, did he embrace the advice which was given him by his confidential friends and flatterers, to put this enemy of his peace to death, by an ignominious execution, that he might have the shocking pleasure of seeing the innocent victim of his vengeance hung on high in the presence of all the people. But Providence over-ruled the wicked-

ness of this wretch in such a way, that the very invention designed to gratify his malevolence, proved his own destruction; and while he was plotting the murder of Mordecai, as a prelude to the general massacre of the Jewish people, the even hand of justice was turning all his schemes with full measure upon his own head. Haman was first obliged to render public homage to the man for whom he had prepared a banquet; and soon after, his iniquity being brought to light, he was suspended thereon by virtue of the same law, thus verifying the saying of Virgil, *Quid prodest scelus, si scelus cadit*; the saying of the upright shall deliver them, and the professors shall be taken in their own snare. Prov. 26. 28.

JUNE THE THIRTEENTH.

INTEGRITY OF JOB.

*Job is not to be despised, nor charged
with impiety.*

No person of our Writings has occasioned more observation, inquiry, and conjecture, than the Book of Job. Its high antiquity may be inferred from the total want of any allusion to those historical events and institutions, which form so large a portion of the other Scriptures; and also from the very remarkable circumstance, that throughout the whole piece only one species of idolatry is mentioned, and that the most early of all, the worship of the sun and moon. Who the author of this exquisite poem was, cannot be determined; for while the Jewish writers in general ascribe it to Moses, others, with many very acute critics, adjudge it to Job himself; though some have fancied it to be the production of Elihu; and others, in opposition to all internal evidence, attribute it to

Ezra, or one of the prophets. They who contend for the modern date, deny the reality of the person of Job, representing both him and his friends as mere allegorical figures of the Jewish nation in its captive state, and of its principal persecutors. But this wild hypothesis is completely overturned by the attestation borne to the existence and the virtue of the extraordinary sufferer by the prophet Ezekiel, in the Old Testament, and the apostle James in the New ; neither of whom surely would have adduced an ideal being, or a parabolical character, as the grave example of faith and patience. With respect to the country of Job, there can be less difficulty ; for the scene where this story is laid evidently shows that it must have been in Arabia the Stony, between Egypt and the land belonging to the Philistines. That he was at the head of some principality is probable from the dignified language made use of by him and his opponents ; and more particularly from the reference which he directly makes in his degraded state to the high authority he had exercised in the " days of his youth, when the secret of God was upon his tabernacle." Ch. xxix. 4. The principal intent of the book is to justify the ways of God to man, by showing that afflictions are no marks of the Divine displeasure, because good men may suffer in this respect more than the wicked. But the history opens the interior system of the Divine government in the dispensation of prosperity and adversity, and discloseth much of the origin of evil in the world, the existence and operation of which we find satisfactorily and beautifully reconciled to this great fundamental truth, that the " Almighty looketh upon men ; and if any say, I have sinned and perverted right, and it profited me not, he will deliver that soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light. Lo, all these things worketh God oftentimes with men, to bring back his soul from the pit, to be

enlightened with the light of the living." Ch. xxiii. 27—30.

The history opens with a high character of this extraordinary personage: "There was a man in the land of Uz (or Edom), whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God and eschewed evil." His reputation was deservedly great among his contemporaries; and both in a public and private capacity he exhibited a model of virtue, that could not fail to be an object of admiration to those who beheld the example, and were benefited by its influence. "I put on righteousness, and it clothed me," says he in his abject state: "my judgment was as a robe and a diadem. I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame. I was a father to the poor, and the cause which I knew not, I searched out. And I brake the jaws of the wicked, and plucked the spoil out of his teeth." In such a course of usefulness, it was natural for this upright man to indulge the pleasing expectation that he should "die in his nest, and multiply his days as the sand." Ch. xxix. 14—18. But pure as the motives of Job were, and excellent as his conduct was, he had still much to learn, and more virtue to acquire. It was necessary that his integrity should be tried by temptation, and that his heart should be improved by passing through the fire of affliction. His moral qualities were indeed truly great, and he made a proper use of his honours and his riches; but he wanted one thing, and that was the right knowledge of himself, the sense of his own insufficiency, and a mortified submissive temper to the mysterious decrees of Providence. The intelligent principle of all evil, that ever-active and impure spirit, which, like the natural darkness, continually hovers upon the progress of light, brought this accusation against the righteous patriarch, that his religion was nothing better than hypocrisy, and that all his piety was the mere consequence of his pro-

prosperity. "Doth Job fear God for nought?" said the artful seducer; and this question he followed up by an enumeration of the various blessings which had been showered down upon the good man; but, added the tempter, "Put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face." In whatever light we may understand this wonderful representation of the spiritual world, enough appears in it to mark the disposition and power of an agent continually opposed to the righteous, and even watchful to take every advantage against them. But then, for our comfort, we also find, that however malignant and formidable this being may be, he is nothing in himself, and is utterly incapable of injuring the works of God, or even of drawing man aside from the path of duty, if he be resisted with firmness and in an absolute dependence upon Divine grace. Satan obtained leave to strip Job of all his earthly glory and comforts in rapid succession; and this permission the dæmon of mischief exercised with all the ingenuity of his superior cunning and inveterate malice. One calamity after another poured down upon the head of this holy sufferer with the utmost violence, till all his property was gone; so that, from being the richest man in the East, he became the most destitute. The sum of his losses was completed by the melancholy catastrophe which befell his children in the midst of a festival, where they were all assembled, and swept off in a moment by an hurricane. Yet, when this fatal intelligence reached the unhappy father, he could say, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither; the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

JUNE THE FOURTEENTH.

THE INTEGRITY OF JOB.

Job, ii. 10.—*But he said unto her, Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What! shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?*

THOUGH this ancient book undoubtedly contains the true history of an excellent person, brought through a fiery trial to honour and happiness; yet being composed in the dramatic form, it exhibits some poetical imagery, to indicate the design of the performance, and to figure for our conception the nature of moral evil and its entire subserviency to the will of God. Hence we read of celestial assemblies at stated periods, into which the accusing spirit, called Satan, intrudes his person, and holds a kind of disputation with the Almighty concerning the religious principles of Job. This machinery, and these colloquies, are ornamented in the Oriental style; but allegorical as the representation is, it must be considered as founded upon a system of reality, and as fully expressive of the early belief in that variety of spiritual beings, commonly denominated good and evil angels. Though, therefore, the conventions and discourses may be embellishments, the great agents in the scene are tremendous powers, and not mere personifications; for if the accuser and tormentor of Job be ideal, it follows, that He who is the controul-er of the one and the protector of the other, must be figurative also; consequently the book and its doctrine will be reduced to the rank of a fable, the design of which it will be impossible to comprehend. But if one part be an accommodation to our understandings, the history itself, both with respect to the sufferings of Job and the cause of them,

is still a genuine relation of what actually happened through the malignity of man's great enemy, and the gracious permission of his Creator. When Satan failed in his attempt to shake the pious confidence of Job, by robbing him of all his worldly possessions, he would not relinquish his object, but still persisted in charging that faith as hypocrisy, which had hitherto baffled his violence. "Skin for skin," said the accuser, "yea all that a man hath, will he give for his life; but put forth thine hand, now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face." In this we perceive that the knowledge of the tempter is extremely limited, even as it regards the human mind; and thus we learn two most valuable truths from the history, that as this formidable being has no other command over the powers of nature than what is allowed for good purposes; so with all his subtilty he cannot penetrate into the thoughts and motives of man, unless advantage be given him by our want of virtue and diligence. To defeat the wickedness of Satan and crown the sufferer with glory, to show the rectitude of the Divine proceedings, and establish a lesson of direction and consolation for ever, the person of Job was exposed to the attack of some dreadful disease. Speculations upon the nature of this complaint are beside our purpose; neither indeed could the inquiry answer any useful end; for as the visitation was of an uncommon kind, no descriptions of any known maladies will correspond with the account which Job gives of his own case. "When I lie down, I say, When shall I arise, and the night be gone? And I am full of tossings to and fro, unto the dawning of the day. My flesh is clothed with worms and clods of dust; my skin is broken and become loathsome. My bones are pierced in me in the night-season, and my sinews take no rest. I am a brother to dragons and a companion to owls. My skin is black upon me, and my

bones are burnt with heat." Such in part is the view which we are enabled to take of his bodily affliction, which was heightened to a considerable degree by those fearful terrors and mental agonies, that made him loath life and desire death with more earnestness than men dig for hidden treasure. Ch. iii. 21. To aggravate his misery, the wife of his bosom treated the religious principles upon which he rested with sceptical contempt, and upbraided him for still adhering to the service of One who had given him up as a prey to the enemy. "Dost thou still retain thine integrity?" said she with harsh severity; "worship thy God, and die!" To this bitter and cruel irony the upright believer made the reply which constitutes in fact the great moral of the poem: "Thou speakest as one of the foolish (or idolatrous) women speaketh. What! shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" Thus far, then, Job triumphed over all the trials of his adversary; nor could the loss of his property, the wretched fate of his children, his own acute pains of body and mind, or the shocking counsel and reproaches of his wife, weaken his belief in that Being at whose altar he had hitherto so piously served, and on whose providence he still depended. Well then might the Apostle adduce this example of suffering, for the comfort of the Christian church, in her afflicted state: "Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord, that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy." James, v. 10, 11.

JUNE THE FIFTEENTH.

THE COMPLAINT OF JOB.

Job, vii. 20.—I have sinned; what shall I do unto thee, O thou Preserver of men? Why hast thou set me as a mark against thee, so that I am a burden to myself?

To alleviate the weight of sorrow, and to ease the agony of pain, our merciful Creator implanted in the human heart the sentiments of benevolence and compassion, which no man can obliterate without doing violence to his nature. We look around for pity and consolation, at least from our fellow-creatures, if they can afford nothing more for our relief, when trouble hath brought us low and sickness hath rendered us helpless. It is the just claim of what we think to be our due from all who have any pretensions to the character of humanity; and when the return of sympathy is refused, the mind forgets its misery for a while, to express the warmth of its resentment. But that the cup of affliction might be filled to the brim, Job had this also to experience, in addition to his calamities; and three of his intimate friends, renowned as it should seem for their years, dignity, and wisdom, instead of pouring the balm of hope into his wounded spirit, reproached him with judicial severity for having, by some secret transgression, brought this accumulation of woes upon his head. The Wise Man hath laid down this rule of caution to be observed in our judgment of others, "Be not righteous overmuch" (Eccles. vii. 16); by which we are to understand that even justice may be too rigidly administered; and that it becometh not such frail and erring mortals as we are, to exercise a strict scrutiny into the motives and conduct of our fellow-creatures. The friends of Job were of a dis-

ferent opinion ; and though they might perhaps leave their respective places of abode with the charitable intention of rendering what assistance they could to the unfortunate man, yet on finding that his wretchedness exceeded what had been reported, each of these sages concluded rashly enough that he was an object of Divine vengeance. They sat down in silence to contemplate this sad spectacle ; and the more they considered the case, the stronger was their persuasion that it was the retribution of Providence for some great iniquity, which had been grossly aggravated by the semblance of extraordinary holiness in the sinner. When Job gave utterance to his grief, and in an impassioned strain of melancholy eloquence painted his agonies, and prayed for death as a release from the intolerable burden, these visitants found also the use of their tongues, and entered into a formal disputation with one whom it was their duty to have comforted. That men, who had no other ground for their harsh determinations than the external condition of the unhappy sufferer, should still obstinately persist in charging him with some hidden wickedness, was sufficient to warrant on his part an appeal to his private virtues and his public integrity. He maintained his innocence with firmness, and he repelled the uncharitable accusations which were brought against him, with the indignation of a mind conscious of its rectitude. If in the course of this vindication the good man gave way to the acuteness of his feelings by betraying too keen a resentment against his opponents, and too much complacency in speaking of his own actions ; let the repeated provocations which he endured be offered as an apology for what at the utmost can be accounted only the blemishes and shades of humanity. His afflictions were of no common cast and magnitude ; but the calamities which he had sustained, and the bodily ills under which he now laboured, all concurred to produce impatience

and despondency ; while, in this dark and troubled state of his mind, the censures of those eminent persons, who called themselves his friends, tended to increase the agitation of his thoughts ; and the more so, as he knew that all their surmises and suspicions were cruel and unjust. In all that passed between these disputants the advantage was clearly on the side of Job, who fully asserted and made good this truth, that the Almighty, in his moral government of the world, bestows prosperity and adversity indiscriminately upon the good and bad ; so that the external condition of men, in this life, ought by no means to be regarded as any mark of their character or of the Divine judgment. Thus far the suffering patriarch reasoned rightly ; and for all this, as well as for the manner in which he clothed and pointed his arguments, he was afterwards commended by the Almighty himself ; but when he exceeded this boundary of the human intellect, and ventured to call in question the equity of the proceedings by which he was tried in the furnace of affliction, Job, as Elihu said of him, “ certainly spoke without knowledge, and his words were without wisdom.” Ch. xxxiv. 35. The great error of the patriarch was that of trusting to his own righteousness for justification ; and of this he was properly convicted by his three friends ; though, as they acted upon wrong principles, and did not set him in the right way, they were justly condemned at the close of the trial, when the Almighty gave his judgment upon the controversy. In the height of his impatience, and earnest desire of a speedy deliverance, Job could not discover any thing in his temper or deportment, that merited so heavy a visitation. “ If I have sinned,” says he, “ what shall I do unto thee, O thou Observer of men ? Why hast thou set me as a mark against thee, so that I am a burden to myself ?” Such was the bitter complaint of Job, and it must be allowed to have far exceeded the limits of moderation. The assumption of perfection

was arrogant, and the charge of severity inconsiderate ; but all this proceeded from the perturbation of an honest but an unawakened heart ; for when, by the preaching of Elihu and the powerful demonstration of the eternal Spirit, he was brought to a sight of his inward deformity, he could confess, “ Behold, I am vile, what shall I answer thee ? I will lay my hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken, but I will not answer ; yea, twice, but I will proceed no further.” Ch. xl. 4, 5. The intent of the visitation, then, was to humble Job in his own estimation, and to make him sensible, that whatever might be his outward righteousness, with regard to his fellow-creatures, yet, before the infinite purity of Omniscience, he was utterly destitute of any plea by which he could be justified, and consequently, that he must depend for acceptance only on Divine Grace. When he was brought to this renunciation of his own works for justification, he could address the Father of Mercy with thankfulness ; “ I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee ; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.”

JUNE THE SIXTEENTH.

THE FAITH OF JOB.

Job, xix. 25—27. I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth : and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God ; whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another ; though my reins be consumed within me.

ONE of the strangest conceits that ever entered the imagination of the fastidious critic, in his attempts to

clear up the obscurities of the Hebrew Scriptures, is the idea that the doctrine of a future state made no part of that early revelation which God vouchsafed to bestow upon man. To what purpose religious services were instituted, or Divine promises imparted, on the supposition that man had nothing to hope or dread beyond the present life, the most sagacious understanding would be unable to explain. In this life there is such a promiscuous distribution of good and evil, that we rarely observe things in the moral world apportioned according to our estimate of the human character; for while the righteous often live in penury and languish in sorrow, the "wicked are not in trouble as other men, neither are they plagued like other folk. Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment. Their eyes stand out with fatness, they have more than heart could wish." Ps. lxxiii. 5—7. This seeming irregularity in the allotment of prosperity and adversity, made the Preacher say, "As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even unto me; and why was I then more wise? For there is no remembrance of the wise more than the fool for ever; seeing that which now is, in the days to come shall all be forgotten; and how dieth the wise man? As the fool. Therefore I hated life, because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me; for all is vanity and vexation of spirit." Eccles. ii. 15—17. Now, such a conclusion would have been just to the fullest extent, if the present state had been the boundary of human science and expectation. But it is not to be supposed that the gracious Being who gave man a law at the beginning, and a promise after his transgression, would leave him destitute of all information upon the state of existence after the present life.

When our first parents fell from their obedience, and forfeited immortality with the delights of Para-

dise, a deliverer was assured to them, and at the same time it was declared that this person should be a conqueror. But long as the lives of the patriarchs were, none of them saw this promise fulfilled, though all of them died in the persuasion of its accomplishment. "Faith was to them the substance of things hoped for; the evidence of things not seen." Heb. xi. 1. It will be difficult, however, to conjecture how the distant prospect of a temporal salvation could have given them any support, when the shadows of evening were lengthening upon them, and the decay of nature convinced them that death would soon cut them off from all personal enjoyment of the blessing. If they had no idea of a spiritual redemption, and of an immediate entrance into a state of felicity, grounded upon that promise, we shall seek in vain for the principle of consolation, which supported them in the vicissitudes of life and the agonies of dissolution. Yet we find that all these righteous persons, both before and after the flood, were supported by faith, during their long pilgrimage in this world; and that when they came to the termination of their course, it still continued to animate them; so that their minds appeared to be invigorated rather than weakened, when they were about to be gathered unto their fathers. The pious Jacob, towards the close of his chequered life, confessed that his days had been few and evil; yet what a triumphant scene does his dying bed display, when, surrounded by his children, he divided an inheritance among them, according to the condition of their families; while of himself he says, "I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord!" Thus, also, the afflicted Job, in the midst of his privations, forsaken by his kindred, persecuted by the ungenerous accusations of his acquaintance, suffering under the severest bodily anguish, and scared by mental terror, still would he not let go his hope: "Though he slay me," says he,

“yet will I trust in him.” Ch. xiii. 15. But what salvation could either of these excellent persons look for, since the one knew that his glass was run out, and the other was impatient for a dismissal from the troubles which pressed upon him beyond measure? The whole creation was a blank to them; and if there was nothing beyond it, the reflection, either upon past mercies or miseries, instead of affording any consolation, would have sunk their minds into despair. Job, in particular, had no reason to express himself with confidence of what should happen after his departure, if the belief of another state of conscious existence made no part of his religious profession. His children had been taken away in a dreadful manner by an apparent blast from heaven; so that the future glory of his family could be no object of pleasing expectation to him; and with respect to himself, he was evidently cut off from all hope of renovation and deliverance. Still, under all these distressing circumstances, his mind rose above the conflicting force of inward temptations and outward oppressions, to make a glorious confession, which should be thus rendered, “I know that my vindicator liveth, and at the last over the dust he shall arise. And after my skin they have destroyed this body, even then from my flesh shall I behold God; whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another, though my reins be consumed within me.” When the situation of the speaker is considered, it is plain that his language will bear no other sense than that of a restoration to life after the ordinary dissolution of the body, which must undergo the usual process of putrefaction before the Vindicator, or Avenger, shall arise at the last days, or the consummation of all things, to raise the scattered dust. If this remarkable declaration of the afflicted patriarch be compared with the circumstances of Adam, and the promise made to him

after his fall, the explication will be confirmed and illustrated with great force. There it is said, that dust should continue to be the serpent's meat, or the prey of the destroyer, all the days of his lives; that is, untill the appointed time, when his head shall be crushed by the seed of the woman, the avenger and vindicator expected by Job. But to evade this powerful text, which so fully shows the primitive faith in the divinity of Christ, and the resurrection of all believers, by his triumph over death, it has been asserted that the hopes of the speaker were limited to a temporal deliverance, in the recovery of his health and the establishment of his character. But to every such expectancy he was at this very time a stranger; for just before the profession of his faith in an Avenger, or Redeemer, he thus deplored his destitute condition: "God hath destroyed me on every side, and I am gone; and mine hope hath he removed like a tree." Here he represents himself as a scathed and withered trunk, which, whatever might have been its former verdure and usefulness, was now smitten by the stroke of heaven, and rendered utterly useless in this world. Job, therefore, had nothing on which he could build any assurance in the view of prolonged life, the renewal of health, and a restoration to ease and prosperity. Besides, whatever excellence there might be in such things, or however desirable must have been to one so wretched as Job the hope of a deliverance of this nature, he would hardly have expressed it in terms of such majestic sublimity and confidence. The prospect of tranquil days to come, might have drawn from his lips the effusion of pious dependence upon the Divine goodness; but it would not have occasioned the note of triumph, and the amplification of the victor's song, if the patriarch had not felt somewhat of the spirit which animated the Apostle when he contemplated a similar scene: "O death, where is

thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God which giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Cor. xv. 35—37.

JUNE THE SEVENTEENTH.

THE RESTORATION OF JOB.

Job, xlii. 12.—*So the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning.*

THE patience of Job has become a proverbial phrase; and so familiar is this idea, that few think more of the character than as it affords an example of that virtue. But firm as he was in maintaining his integrity, and holding fast his faith without wavering, in the various trials which assailed him, it cannot be denied that he uttered many unguarded expressions, as well concerning the dealings of God towards him, as in his replications to the severe and unjust censures of his three friends. When, however, the arguments of Eliphaz awakened Job to a sense of his error, he submitted in silence to the judgment of this extraordinary moderator; and thus his heart was prepared for the Divine teaching which followed. In this celestial oratory the pride of human learning is humbled to the dust, by the amazing display of that Sovereign Power and Wisdom, to which all orders of beings are subservient, and from which the mightiest of them derive their strength and sagacity. At the close of this wonderful discourse, the almighty Speaker describes two creatures, here called the Behemoth and the Leviathan. These names have been properly left untranslated in our version of the Bible; for, after all the pains taken by ancient and modern commen-

tators to apply the characters to known animals, many points remain which cannot be explained by the observations of the naturalist. There is something in particular so terrible in the account of the Leviathan, that though much of the picture may agree with the crocodile, still, upon the whole, some being far above that monster of the waters must have been intended. Invisible powers are throughout the Sacred Writings, particularly the poetical parts, represented under familiar appearances, and delineated in terms expressive of objects with which we are acquainted. This seems to be the case in the present instance, where the might, hatred, and unconquerable fierceness of the great adversary are figured in such a manner as to bring before us the most potent and venomous of reptiles; but amplified in size, and strength, and fury, far beyond the creature which serves for a type and shadow of "one, who upon earth has not his like; who is made without fear. He beholdeth all high things: he is a king over all the children of pride." Chap. xli. 33, 34. As Satan is never once mentioned by name after the introductory narrative, where he appears filled with malignity and armed with terror, the reader naturally looks for some notice of the accuser at the end of the piece, when the troubles of the holy sufferer are turned into joy. But though the author of Job's afflictions is seen no more, nor indeed could he well be brought forward in human society, his defeat being completed, it would, as a matter of course, be stated in some way or other. Now no place suited this so properly as the sublime speech, in which the Omnipotent asserts his sovereignty over all nature, and shows that no creature is capable of contending with him; but that all things, visible and invisible, are dependent upon his will. As, therefore, at the commencement of the diabolical agency in our world, the might and the malice of this formidable spirit were represented in the serpent; so

in this restoration of Job, after his persecutions and fiery trials, the character of his enemy appears with all the terrible forms and qualities which are usually observed in the most potent and insatiate of the animal creation. This view of the Leviathan then may be considered as an awful exhibition of the evil principle, ever active and vehement, delighting in destruction, full of treachery, and commanding the very elements to be the ministers of his fury; yet dreadful as this being is, his power is limited, and he sinks into nothing beneath the word of the Almighty.

Taking this grand description as an image of the wicked one, the termination of the piece is correspondent with the beginning, and connects the whole in an admirable manner, by setting forth the triumph of truth and righteousness over the temporary ravages of sin. That the Author and Controuler of all things should, even by comparison, stand in opposition to the crocodile, or any other of the animal tribes, is not easily to be credited. Man himself has conquered the most furious and voracious beasts of prey, while he has rendered submissive to his guidance the strongest and laigest of them all; it seems, therefore, very unaccountable that any of these should be brought forward as affording a proof of infinite might in the Creator, though undoubtedly all of them are demonstrative evidences of his Divine power and wisdom. Most truly is it asked, "Who hath prevented me that I should repay him? Whatsoever is under the whole heaven is mine." But this surely was what Job did not want to be informed of, nor did any of his friends call in question the dominion of God. The position and illustration then must have had some other object, and this was evidently the establishment of the great truth, that notwithstanding the prevalence of evil in the domination of Satan, yet that Divine goodness reigneth over all, and will be made manifest at last in the subjugation of

every thing that opposeth the will of God. In the restoration of Job, and the prolongation of his life to a period little short of two hundred years, we have a typical sketch of man's recovery from the ruin brought upon him by the malevolence of the tempter. But while thus we derive the most valuable instruction in the great mystery of religion from this ancient history, the example of the suffering patriarch affords a beautiful lesson for our conduct, amidst all the trials and crosses of this eventful life. Here we are taught, that however heavy these visitations may be, even though the dark season of trouble should be lengthened to the greatest extent, yet assuredly, if we retain our confidence in God, and submit with all humility to his dispensations, we shall experience the verity of that promise, "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." Ps. cxxvi. 6.

JUNE THE EIGHTEENTH.

THE KINGDOM OF THE MESSIAH.

Psalm ii. 12.—*Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.*

THE lively and pious Luther calls the Book of Psalms, "a little Bible;" and when we consider how much these sublime hymns were used by our blessed Saviour, and how applicable they were to his character and circumstances, the expression of that great reformer will be found perfectly correct. Here, in fact, is delineated the whole scheme of faith, in the prophetic description of His ministry and sufferings, who came to fulfill all righteousness; and here is laid down the rule of practice necessary to be ob-

served by his subjects, if they expect to live and reign with him in glory. But what is said of the whole collection, may also be affirmed of this second Psalm, which is an abstract or summary of all the rest, since it shows the Redeemer in his state of humiliation; persecuted by principalities and powers, but gaining the throne in Zion pursuant to the Divine decree, notwithstanding the violence with which he is assailed, and the mighty combination of earthly and infernal malice to prevent his accession. The complete overthrow of the conspirators, and the utter destruction of every scheme formed against the dominion of this monarch, as here described, cannot, without hyperbolism, be made even the poetical portraiture of David's reign. But that which raises our observation above any temporal monarchy, whether Jewish or Gentile, is the universality of the government here announced, and the call made upon all nations to accept the person here mentioned for their sovereign. Now, if we had not apostolical authority for applying the characteristics in this divine poem exclusively to Christ, the sublimity of the language, and the amplification of ideas, would alone indicate that some more glorious person than the King of Israel is intended, and that the magnificent scene here painted far exceeds any worldly splendour or created dignity. The majesty of this ruler in Zion is too awful, and the extent of his sway too wide and permanent, to correspond with any part of that theocracy which distinguished the chosen people, and separated them from the other families of the earth. Of no king that ever swayed a sceptre over numerous nations, could it be said, that he was Divine; and though the endearing term of paternal relation may be, and often is, used in the Scriptures, with respect to believers, who are called the *child'ren of God*, in no case do we read that any were begotten of him. This filiation is incredible,

and expresses a degree of union infinitely beyond all our conceptions of creation and adoption. And as the personal dignity of this King in Zion is more than human, so his dominion shall be boundless ; “ the Heathen, or the Gentile world, is his inheritance ; and the uttermost parts of the earth are his possession.” But who is this transcendent Potentate, the establishment of whose throne must be preceded by such furious opposition, and will be succeeded by such grandeur and blessing ? What other indeed can he be, but the same Sovereign who brought his chosen out of Egypt, and ruled over them as the Angel of the Covenant, of whom David was a representative, and from whom the whole lineage of kings derived their authority by the consecration of his priests and prophets ? Here this mighty Prince is predicted as taking to himself his great power, and assuming, in the fullness of time, the ensign of judgment and mercy for the future government of mankind. Then did the actual unfolding of this prophecy commence, when the voice from heaven, at the inauguration of the Saviour, proclaimed his nature and mission, “ This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” Matt. iii. 17. His whole course was one continued series of conflicts and victories, with part of which we are acquainted ; but the most tremendous of all cannot even be conceived, till our knowledge of the spiritual world is enlarged by the removal of the mortal veil, and the perfection of intellectual vision. That the reign of the Messiah was to be an object of most inveterate hatred, this prophecy, with many others, expressly asserted ; and all which they depicted was literally fulfilled in the minutest points, and to the greatest extent. The life of our Redeemer was marked with persecution, from his very birth to the period of his being delivered up by the Jews, and put to death, as a king, by the Romans. Even when he had triumphed over

the powers of darkness, and ascended to his throne, at the right hand of God, his church remained exposed to the malignant rage of its adversaries, who united all their efforts to destroy the infant institution, as in their design and opinion they had done its Founder. For the space of three hundred years was the Gospel resisted by the combination of worldly power and wisdom; yet it spread rapidly; though its followers, in embracing and preaching this faith, had nothing before them but contempt and suffering, penury and torment. Such was the kingdom described in prophecy, and actually established by the disciples of Christ, at the expense of all that flesh and blood could regard and enjoy in this life. Yet the more these Divine teachers studied the Scriptures, the clearer proofs did they meet with, that in no other way was this mighty work to be accomplished. They had no riches to attain, no honours to seek; on the contrary, by adopting this profession they were obliged to sacrifice all earthly good, and they were certain of encountering the obloquy and vengeance of the bigotted Jew and the superstitious Gentile. Still, with all this, and much more, before them, to appall the most stout-hearted, these feeble instruments went forth in the cause of righteousness, and in the success of their labours they experienced the fullness of that promise, which, at the close of the prophecy, gives the assurance of an eternal reward to every sincere follower of the Son of God, "Blessed are all they that put their trust in him." This benediction still remains, to encourage those who, renouncing themselves, seek salvation only in the crucified Redeemer. They can rely with full assurance upon his word, who committed them to his Father in these affecting terms: "I in them and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them as thou hast loved me." John, xvii. 23.

JUNE THE NINETEENTH.

THE DIVINE GOODNESS.

Psalm viii. 9 — *O LORD, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!*

IN the study of the Old Testament Scriptures, one of the principal objects to be regarded, is the variety of names under which the Almighty is spoken of in relation to his works of creation, government, and redemption. But unhappily this important branch of Divine knowledge is rendered somewhat difficult by the defects of our common version, and the want of a proper distinction in the several appellations which are used to represent His power and goodness, who is in truth above every name. We have a remarkable instance of this confusion in the present Psalm, where two very different terms in the original, are expressed by one and the same word in English; so that not only is the majesty of the Person hereby obscured, but the main scope of this prophetic piece is quite hidden from the reader's view. Our old translators, whose version, in exactness and simplicity, far exceeds the refined one by which it has been superseded, have approached nearer to a literal construction of the Hebrew, "O Lord, our governor, how excellent is thy name in all the world!" Here the relation between God and man is indeed plainly marked as it should be; but the sense would have been much clearer, by leaving the proper name to stand in its own native dignity, and giving the relative term a more appropriate interpretation, correspondent to the radical meaning of the primitive word. In the first place, the Author of all things is addressed by his incommunicable name, expressive of what he is in himself; and in the next, he appears connected with us by some near affinity. The one sets him forth

as self-existent, eternal, and omnipresent ; the other brings him close to us by a peculiar tie for our special comfort and security. But the same Person who is our stay and dependence, who condescends to stoop from his transcendent glory, that he may become, as it were, one with us, by being the head of our nature, is no other than the pure and essential Divinity that filleth all in all. This we learn from the devout ascription of praise which begins the poem, " O Jehovah, our supporter, how excellent is thy name in all the earth, who hast set thy glory above the heavens !" This is sufficient to denote that the Power, whose praise is the subject of this divine ode, is not an attribute, but the Deity himself ; and thus the reader is prepared for the appearance of the great Creator of all things, in a new form, and under some particular circumstances, in which man has more than an ordinary interest.

Having thus set forth the infinite goodness of God, the divinely inspired Poet proceeds very naturally, considering the nature of his theme, to declare his astonishment at the still greater love and condescension of this wonderful Being in " remembering and visiting man." Now the Psalmist could not but know, for he had just before expressed as much, that the Maker of the universe was the conservator of all things, visible and invisible ; and David certainly was well assured of this truth also, that as man was created in the image of God, he stood, even after the fall, first in the order of animal intelligence. Something more, then, must have been here designed, by this expression of gratitude and admiration, than the pious acknowledgement of the Divine benignity. To what the prophecy was directed, the following passage explains : " Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands ; thou hast put all

things under his feet." However true this may be, of man's superiority to the rest of the creatures, the whole declaration shows that some extraordinary person is here described, who shall not only have a pre-eminent excellence of character, but an actual rule over all the works of God. Now, this can never be said of the human kind in general; for though by mental acuteness we attain the mastery over most, if not all, of the brutal tribes, yet it is equally clear that our power and knowledge are very limited, when compared with the vast range of intellectual energy with which we are but very imperfectly acquainted. But the whole of this Psalm is strictly prophetic; and while it paints in beautiful colours the wisdom and goodness of God in the formation of man, it points our faith to another and more exalted object of admiration in the descent of the same Creator to a state inferior to angels, that he might crown our nature with glory and honour. Such is the explication which an Apostle has given of this exquisite piece, and his argument upon it is decisive: "But one in a certain place testified, saying, What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitest him? Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honour, and didst set him over the works of thy hands. Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet; for in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour, that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man." Heb. ii. 6—9.

JUNE THE TWENTIETH.

THE HOPE OF THE RIGHTEOUS.

Psalm xvi. 9, 10.—*Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth; my flesh also shall rest in hope: for thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.*

ONE of the most important articles in the Christian creed is that of the resurrection, grounded upon the certainty of His word, who confirmed by his own wonderful example the truth of the promise, "Because I live, ye shall live also." John, xiv. 19. It has been supposed that this branch of faith is peculiar to the new covenant, and that it made no part of the believer's expectation before the coming of Him who "abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light, through the Gospel." 2 Tim. i. 10. But this is evidently a hasty conclusion; for though the doctrine was far from being clearly known under the patriarchal and legal dispensations, yet nothing can be more certain than this, that the righteous, even in the earliest ages, regarded the state of departed souls as a place of security and joy, from whence they should look for a restoration to life.

When good old Jacob poured out his lamentation for the loss of his favourite child, this obvious consolation, drawn from religion, came to relieve his afflicted mind: "I will go down to my son mourning." Where? not into the grave, as our translators have most improperly rendered the original, but into Sheol, or Hades, the receptacle of departed spirits, and particularly that part of it appropriated to those who die in faith, or, as it is said in other places, who have been gathered unto their fathers. The same word by which the venerable patriarch expressed

the object of his desire, is used in this Psalm to mark the temporary abode of the person here spoken of, who could not be David; for, as two Apostles rightly argued, in preaching to the Jews upon this passage of Scripture, the body of the king of Israel saw corruption, and his soul remained in the state of the dead. In this remarkable prophecy the authors of both versions have rightly adopted the word Hell, in conformity with our Saxon ancestors, who understood by that term not the infernal region, but the covered or hidden place, to which the separated spirit goes on its dismissal from the body; and where it remains in the felicity of hope, or in the fearful expectation of judgment, till the consummation of all things. But evident as it is that the Psalmist knew there was such a local habitation of souls after death, still his declaration in this text cannot be considered as the profession of his own individual expectancy; for though his flesh might be said very properly to rest in hope, it could by no means be affirmed of his body, that it should not see corruption. The whole poem is in fact directly prophetic, and no part of it can be applied to David himself; of which, indeed, we are informed in this very passage, where the person who is represented as descending into hell, and rising from thence, is called the Holy, or Merciful One; an appellation which in neither sense would the sweet singer of Israel have used of himself. In the second and third verses we have a complete clue to the whole piece; for there we find this Mediator, or Merciful One interposing between the righteous God, and sinful but redeemed men. In the act of undertaking their cause he makes this avowal, that "his goodness is not necessary to the Divinity, but absolutely so to the saints in the earth, the excellent in whom is all his delight." Now, in whatever sense we take the word goodness in this place, whether denoting that which is intrinsically

valuable, or externally beautiful and attractive ; delightful as an object of contemplation, or profitable for some useful purposes, it must be that which is essentially requisite to render men acceptable in the sight of God. Here, then, we behold One who engages on the behalf of those who are called saints, or holy persons : not because they are such in themselves, but that they become so by virtue of their connection with this Redeemer, and by the sanctifying influence of his Spirit. At the eighth verse we find this merciful Saviour setting forth his righteousness still more emphatically ; glorying with peculiar majesty in his strength, and anticipating a mighty victory : “ I have set Jehovah always before me ; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.” Now if all this implies opposition, contention, and the utmost violence, on the one hand, the language of the speaker is full of divine energy, in the midst of the conflict and of triumph, even in the prospect of that which might reasonably be considered as the destruction of all confidence. “ Therefore,” says he, “ my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth ; my flesh also shall dwell securely ; for thou wilt not leave my soul in hell (or the place of the dead) : neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.” From this view of the Psalm it is plain that the whole is a regular prophecy of the redemption wrought out by the incarnation, death, and resurrection of the Messiah, who is described as the representative of his sanctified people, the chosen, upon whom he hath placed his affection or delight. The sphere of his action is the earth, from whence his soul passeth into that invisible world, here called hell, while his body remains free from putrefaction in its dormitory. But to what end is this restraint laid upon the ordinary course of nature, and that too in a climate, and under circumstances, which must make this marvellous suspension of mortification more wonderful ?

The question is here answered—that the separation is but for a limited period; the soul shall come back from the hidden-place, reanimate its former tabernacle, and raise it by the Divine power from the tomb. More than this, we are even informed for what purpose the mighty victor accomplishes these marvels: it is to open or indicate the path of life; to restore that immortality which was lost; and to bring those who are born again of the Spirit, and clothed with the garment of salvation, into the presence of God, where “is fullness of joy, and at whose right-hand there are pleasures for evermore.”



JUNE THE TWENTY-FIRST.

THE KING OF GLORY.

Psalm xxiv. 9, 10.—*Lift up your heads, O ye gates, even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of Glory shall come in. Who is this King of Glory? The Lord of Hosts, he is the King of Glory.*

IF it were possible to arrange the Psalms in the exact order of their original composition, and if the peculiar circumstances under which they were all written, could be precisely determined, many obscure parts of the Sacred History might be made plain and clear, while the whole would exhibit a regular series of prophetic descriptions, pointing directly to the Messiah, by incidents illustrative of his life. But even as these divine hymns now stand, enough appears in them to show that they have an application far beyond the occurrences of any temporal kingdom, or the condition of a mere human being, however exalted in rank or distinguished by virtue, celebrated for his achievements or remarkable for his suffering.

We have already followed the footsteps of a wonderful Person laying aside his glory, and in the nature of man enduring all its sinless infirmities ; submitting to death, and passing into the region where the souls of the righteous are in felicity waiting for the redemption of their bodies from the hand of the enemy. We have also, through the medium of prophetic Scripture, beheld this mighty Saviour returning again from that world ; and thus by his resurrection becoming the first fruits of them that slept, vanquishing the king of terrors, bruising the serpent's head in the seat of his dominion, and bearing off in triumph " the keys of hell and of death." Rev. i. 18. Now what was so remarkably predicted of the allegorical David, and described in such explicit terms as to signify nothing less than an absolute freedom from bodily corruption, literally took place when the corporeal frame of Jesus, scourged, lacerated, bruised, and pierced in the most vital organ, yet resisted putrefaction, and rose again in the full possession and active exercise of all its powers. The twenty-fourth Psalm displays the consequences of this great victory, in a view of the government founded by the mighty Conqueror, and his elevation to the throne, which he hath obtained by his righteousness. Truly is it observed that the whole earth belongeth to this very Jehovah, who laid the foundation thereof in the morning of the creation, and established the laws by which the stupendous machine continues its operations. But the dominion here described is of another kind, and has for its objects not so much the material world, as " they that dwell therein." This government is acquired by the virtues of the Person in whom it is vested, and his qualifications form the principal subject of this beautiful poem. It is made a matter of anxious enquiry, " Who shall ascend to the hill of Jehovah, and who shall stand in his holy place ?" If the question implies uncommon difficulty of access, the answer puts

the attainment quite out of the reach of human merit; for it expressly declares that none shall arrive at this honour but "he that hath clean hands and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul into vanity, nor sworn or vowed deceitfully." If such an one, indeed, can be found among the inhabitants of the earth, "he shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation;" but who is he that can make such a pretension, or assert so high a claim, by the necessary evidences of his intrinsic purity and uniform integrity? who indeed of Adam's progeny will open his lips, and maintain that his soul hath never harboured any vain desire, or that his actions and his thoughts have been regulated in every instance, and under all the trials of life, by the will of God? Yet to no other claimant than this, shall an entrance be given to the throne and the sanctuary here set forth as the prize due to perfect holiness. Whoever the person may be upon whom this great distinction devolves, he thereby unites in himself two characters, the royal and the sacerdotal: for it is said, that "he who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord, must stand also in his holy place;" which office requires peculiar sanctity in him who bears it, to render his services acceptable, not for himself, but for others. Thus, then, the King who reigns in Zion is also a priest ruling over his subjects for their protection, and perfecting them by his grace. Well, therefore, might it be asked, how the throne, requiring such powers and virtues, could possibly be filled. Happily for those who stood in need of a Mediator and Redeemer, the seat of righteousness was not left unoccupied; for One in our nature did fulfill the law to its utmost extent; and by offering himself up as a sacrifice for sin, he hath opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers. Having satisfied Divine justice on the cross, and abolished death by triumphing over it in his resurrection, he hath pro-

cured a spiritual dominion, in which he dispenseth pardon to sinners, and gives from his throne them the right of admission, through his blood, to the tree of life, in the paradise of God. The ascent of this mighty Potentate to his palace, is described with great pomp; and the heralds who lead the procession, sound before the victor King this high demand to the celestial hierarchies: "Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lifted up ye everlasting doors, and the King of Glory shall come in." The guardian spirits, from within, are represented as acting with the caution necessary to their trust, and replying to the unusual claim, "Who is this King of Glory?" They who had witnessed the marvellous exploits of the warrior, treading down by his own strength the powers and principalities that were opposed to the work of salvation, cry aloud, "Jehovah, strong and mighty; Jehovah, mighty in battle!" Still the holy watchers require a more determinate character, as the proof of the Divinity, "Who is this King of Glory?" To this they receive that answer which sets all doubts at rest, and silences every objection, "Jehovah of hosts, who reigns over the armies of heaven and earth, he is the King of Glory." Thus did the incarnate Saviour take possession of his mediatorial kingdom, from whence he issues this universal proclamation, inviting all sinners to participate in the blessings of his government: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches." Rev. iii. 20—22.

JUNE THE TWENTY-SECOND.

THE HUMILIATION OF CHRIST.

Psalm xl. 12.—For innumerable evils have compassed me about; mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up: they are more than the hairs of mine head; therefore my heart faileth me.

"OF whom," to use the language of the Ethiopian convert, "of whom doth the prophet here speak: is it of himself or of some other man?" Whatever were the troubles which David experienced, and the record of his life shows that they were neither light nor few, it will be hard to find any portion of his eventful history that corresponds with the mournful representations contained in this Psalm. But there are some parts of this piece which remove the application altogether from the king of Israel, who in the numerous vicissitudes which he was called to pass through, never sunk so low as to become a bond-man. The person, however, who here describes his actions and sufferings, states himself as submitting to perpetual servitude according to the ceremonial of the Mosaic law, by which every domestic so renouncing his liberty was to have his "ear bored through at the door, or door-post, of his master's house." *Exod. xxi. 6.* Now as nothing of this kind ever happened to David, the declaration must belong to one who actually did of his own free motion, and for some righteous purpose, resign a superior station and descend to the lowest degree of labour and pain. It is asserted also, that this act of love is the fulfilment of a promise, and the faithful discharge of a covenant; for the speaker thus refers to a positive contract, and specifies its conditions; "Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou

opened : burnt-offering and sin-offering thou hast not required. Then said I, Lo, I come : In the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God : yea, thy law is within my heart." In the recapitulation of the statutes by Moses, there is an injunction, that on the change of the government to the monarchical form, the king should have a copy of the law fairly transcribed for his daily study. But this could not be the decree to which the royal prophet here alludes, because the one predicts an elevation to the regal dignity, while the other is descriptive of a state of poverty and dependence. The express words here ascribed to the Divine Person who comes to do the will of God, cannot be found, if by the volume of the book we understand the entire roll of inspired writings, as made up to the time of David. Yet the history of Moses informs us that there was another book besides that which he wrote under the guidance of the Spirit ; for when that great legislator interceded on the behalf of the sinful people, and offered himself as a sacrifice for them, he made this extraordinary prayer : " If thou wilt, forgive their sin ; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written ;" to which he received this answer, " Whosoever hath sinned against Me, him will I blot out of my book." Exod. xxxii. 32, 33. This appeal, then, to the volume of the book, must be considered in a similar light as referring not to the code of revelation, but to the secret instrument by which man's salvation was stipulated and secured, both with respect to the means and the objects. The contracting party for the offender is here introduced as coming in the fullness of time, to perform the conditions of the everlasting covenant, and thus perfecting, in his humiliation and sufferings, all that was shadowed in the mysterious services of the ritual and law of Israel. In this prophetic ode there is a mixture of character

and offices which never could be affirmed of any mortal being: for while the speaker asserts his righteousness, he endures the punishment due to sin, and indicted by the absolute will of God. The Intercessor stoops from the highest dignity to the most abject state of slavery: and he complains pathetically of the evils which encompass him, and the iniquities that press upon him; though at the same time he glories in having come with a willing mind to encounter the one, and to bear the chastisement of the other. He is possessed of Divine power and majesty, otherwise he would have wanted that equality of rank which is essential to the mediatorial character: yet, notwithstanding his native dignity and spotless purity, he prays for support and relief, groans under the pressure of mental and bodily agony, and seems to sink as it were into the very depth of despair, becoming only the weakest or most guilty of the human race. This willing victim, it is true, does not remain in that state of horror and misery which is here so feelingly painted; for he exults in his deliverance, and he denounces the Divine judgment upon all his persecutors; "They shall be ashamed and confounded together that seek after my soul to destroy it; they shall be driven backward and put to shame that wish me evil." It is plain, therefore, that this Psalm is prophetically descriptive of some extraordinary person, who, in pursuance of a previous agreement, enters into bondage and endures punishment, that he may "give his life a ransom for many." *Matt. xx. 28.* That this is the true and only meaning, will appear from what is said of the inefficacy of holocausts and other offerings, which were however of Divine appointment, and regulated by various precepts. But in this place they are pronounced no longer acceptable, because he whom they represented was come to shed his blood in person, and to act as the surety

for those who could not obtain forgiveness without redemption. Justly, then, does the evangelical commentator upon the book of the law, expound this passage, as a proof that all the sacrificial rites and services were merely the shadows of good things to come. When, observes the Apostle, it is said, "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God," He, the Messiah, "taketh away the first, that he may establish the second. By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ, once, that is, completely and for ever." Heb. x. 9, 10. To no other object could all this apply than the Person who, though he was declared to be "the Son of God with power;" yet "made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Philip. ii. 7, 8. That the Saviour of the world should be reduced to the most miserable circumstances, and be put to an ignominious death, is in the opinion of many an incredible doctrine; but however repugnant it may be to the pride of human reason, it is certain that the whole tenour of prophecy announces no other Messiah, as the redeemer and ruler of mankind, than a suffering one. All the glory and majesty predicted of him will be found to belong only to his original dignity, of which he divests himself; and to the dominion which, by this degradation and its consequences, he acquires, that he might "become the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him." Heb. v. 9. Now when we read that this Sovereign could obtain mercy for us in no other way than by sustaining in the human nature the punishment due to our offences, we discern the malignity of sin, as that which puts an eternal separation between God and the soul that is defiled with it. Without an expiation our case

would have been hopeless, and without the righteousness of a mediator there can be no access to the Throne of Grace. Here we see our perfect Substitute, himself, complaining of the dark and dismal veil which hung between his spirit and the Fountain of Light : "The iniquities which I bear have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up ; they are more than the hairs of mine head ; therefore my heart faileth me." If it be asked, at what time this tremendous conflict occurred, the pressure of which made even the Divinity struggle against the load of accumulated transgression, the scene was realized when the angel endeavoured to strengthen Him, "who being in an agony prayed more earnestly, till his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground." Luke, xxii. 44.

JUNE THE TWENTY-THIRD.

THE DIVINE WARRIOR.

Psalm xlv. 3, 4. — *Bind thy sword upon thy thigh,
O most mighty ; with thy glory and thy majesty.
And in thy majesty ride prosperously, because of
truth, and meekness, and righteousness ; and thy
right hand shall teach thee terrible things.*

THIS mystic song celebrates the marriage of a mighty warrior, after having conquered his enemies, taken possession of the sceptre, and been anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows. The two great characters, therefore, in the piece, are the victor king and his beautiful bride ; who are described with all the splendid imagery of oriental poetry ; the dignity and exploits of the one being admirably set off by the external ornaments and inward graces of the other. Some have very erroneously

represented this poem as an epithalamium, in the prophetic style, on the union of Solomon with the princess of Egypt. But though the subject is undoubtedly a royal marriage, it is clear that this celebrated king could not be the bridegroom; for whatever might be the renown and accomplishments of Solomon, certain it is that he had no military achievements to boast of, as his reign was proverbially pacific; whereas the monarch, whose character and espousals form the theme of this sublime ode, is principally distinguished by his feats in arms. At the opening of the poem, the prophet sets forth the personal attractions of the king, concerning whom he writes: "Thou art fairer than the children of men; grace is poured into thy lips: therefore God hath blessed thee for ever." Now we know, that in the Divine estimation, a graceful form and eloquence of expression, so far from being virtues, are of little or no account; for while "man looketh on the outward appearance, the Lord looketh on the heart." 1 Sam. xvi. 7. This benediction of the king, because he was transcendently "fairer than the children of Adam," for so the original might be properly rendered, must denote something far beyond elegance of figure or beauty of countenance; and though the next attribute certainly implies dignity of language and sweetness of speech, yet the whole description must be taken as the character of inward purity and attraction. The extraordinary person here addressed, is represented as spotless and without blemish; so that, being perfect in holiness, he exceeds the whole human race. But he is not merely lovely, as being free from all fault; his discourse also is majestic, powerful, and persuasive. "Grace is poured into his lips." The charms of innocence, which render him so desirable, are his own; but this energetic command of language, this sway over the souls of men, by what may be called celestial

oratory, is represented as a communication for some peculiar purposes. The beautiful vessel is first ascertained to be infinitely pure before that grace, of which it is the recipient and the imparted, can be poured into it; which figure is thus explained by Him of whom it was used: "For he whom God hath sent, speaketh the words of God; for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him." John, iii. 34. Here, then, we have a clear exposition, both of the description given of this wonderful king, and the commission with which he is invested immediately after receiving the grace of God's Holy Spirit. He is now charged to array himself in Divine armour, to gird on his sword upon his thigh, and to take his bow and quiver; that by the force of his tremendous arm, and the swiftness of his arrows, aimed with unerring skill, he may vanquish the king's enemies; that is, subdue all who set themselves against the establishment of his throne. Connecting this view of him as a warrior with what is previously said of his righteousness and eloquence, it is obvious that the terrible imagery of a field of battle, and the panoply here so forcibly painted, must be considered as allegorical of the irresistible power of truth over error, and the progress of the Gospel by its own strength, in opposition to all the combinations of human and diabolical malice. The salvation of mankind is of itself a warfare, and that of the most awful nature; the life of the believer, after being rescued from his great enemy and restored to spiritual liberty, is also one continued conflict with principalities and powers, till he enters into the rest that remaineth for the people of God; and the history of Christianity is little else than the record of persecution, excited and directed, in one form or another, against doctrines which have no worldly inducements for their recommendation. But the great captain here introduced and described as excelling all the

posterity of Adam, goes forth to conquer; and it is promised, at the equipment of him, "that the peoples," in the plural form, "shall fall under his sway," which dominion will be universal and eternal; for thus it is described: "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: the sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre." Having gained the victory, and taken possession of the throne by right of conquest, the prophet dwells with rapture upon the excellence of the royal personage and the splendour of his appearance: "Thou hast loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows." Thus if there had been any obscurity in what went before, the whole is explained here in the real qualifications, on account of which this accomplished person obtains consecration: His perfect righteousness, and complete freedom from sin; in a state of trial, alone procures him the victory and the sceptre. The Psalmist then gives a minute exhibition of the coronation, and describes the magnificence of the king's apparel; but all this is only introductory to the principal intention of the poem, the subject of which is the union of Heaven and Earth, here figured under the pleasing representation so common in prophetic Scripture of a royal wedding. Hence it is, that though the might of the warrior, and the majesty of his kingdom, form such striking features in the piece, the title calls it by the softer name of a Song of Loves, because the parade of war and the pomp of state are nothing more than preparatives to a delightful scene of peace and fertility. The bride, who is the reward of the victor's toils, and the crown of his triumph, is here called upon "to forget her own people and her father's house;" which surely must be considered as a very harsh injunction, if nothing more was intended than the glory of some temporal empire and the nuptials of an earthly king. But

when from such comparatively trifling objects we rise to contemplate the dignity of the Messiah, and the consummation of his Church, redeemed and gathered out of all lands, the reason of this command becomes clear, and the obligation is rendered decisive; for if we would live unto righteousness, and become partakers of the Divine nature, by an effectual union with Christ, we must, previously to our entrance into his kingdom, die unto sin. Every soul which thus renounceth sensual desires, and setteth its affections upon the grace of God, as manifested in the person and love of the Redeemer; striving against sin, and aspiring after increased holiness, shall make one of the glorious train that will accompany the king's daughter, at her admission into the palace of her Lord; for to such alone is the promise given: "Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb." Rev. xix. 9.

JUNE THE TWENTY-FOURTH.

THE SPIRITUAL CONFLICT.

Psalm xlix. 5.—*Wherefore should I fear in the days of evil, when the iniquity of my heels shall compass me about?*

By whom, and upon what particular occasion, this beautiful Psalm was composed, we are not informed; but the reverence in which it has been uniformly held by the Hebrew Church, and the appropriation of it to the purposes of funeral consolation, will be sufficient to determine its high antiquity and great importance, even though there should not be strong internal marks to warrant the ascription of it to David. It has been called, foolishly enough, a philosophical psalm, by one of those critics who would

set up their wits in judgment upon the productions of Divine Wisdom; but in reality the poem is strictly prophetic, and exhibits a sublime view of man's redemption from the misery of the fall and his final restoration from death, by the power of God. The attention of the world is therefore called, at the very opening of the piece, to what is of universal moment, affecting alike the inhabitants of all regions, and involving the eternal interests of every generation and condition; "high and low, rich and poor, together." That this proclamation belongs to the Messiah, is evident from the authoritative dignity by which it is distinguished; but it will appear beyond all doubt when the course of the argument is considered, which is the complete subjection of the human race to one common law of mortality, and the resurrection of the speaker from the place of departed souls. The intention of the Psalm is to apply a former prediction, and to reveal the mystery hidden under it; for so the Divine Person declares: "I will incline mine ear to the sentence; I will unfold the enigma that concerns me upon the harp." Such is the avowed design of Him who submits to an irrevocable decree, and who condescends to give man an explanation of it, as far as relates to the blessing, which shall be the result of its fulfillment. Here is then a very important secret, of which we are promised such an insight as to know of whom it is written and what he will perform, though the object, being still future, must remain enveloped in considerable obscurity. When the ancient prophets prepared themselves to receive and impart the Divine communications, they either took themselves a harp, or called for a minstrel. So here the Psalmist expressly declares that he will open the hidden mystery, and expound the meaning of it, to the sound of his instrument, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Some ancient and very dark prophecy, then, is the subject of this pre-

dictive Psalm ; and what the mysterious sentence is, will be ascertained without difficulty, if we attend to the resolution which follows in the interrogatory form, " Why should I fear in the days of evil, when the iniquity of my heels shall compass me about ? " Now this is a thought which, as it stands expressed in our versions, must certainly appear extraordinary, if not indeed presumptuous, in any human being ; for the very reason stated why he should not fear, is that which ought to make him sorrowful. Surely if iniquity, in this place, is to be understood of the Psalmist's moral character, it ought to have abated, instead of inspiring confidence, and have made him penitent and suppliant, rather than resolute and fearless. But though the word, no doubt, implies deliberate wickedness and malignity of the worst kind, it is applied here in the way of opposition, to denote that besetting mischief which the speaker is prepared to encounter, and determined to overcome. It is plain that evil is personified in this place, under the form of the serpent, which by its tortuous shiftings, incessant activity, and venomous fangs, endeavours to impede the progress of one who is bent upon the pursuit of some great object, and resolved at all hazards to persevere in his course. In contemplating this figure, the mind naturally recurs to that remarkable scene in the garden, when the Divine Word pronounced this enigmatical sentence, which contained both a denunciation and a blessing : " I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed. He shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." That this decree related to some individual of the human kind, who was to contend with the subtle enemy of man, is obvious from the tenour of the declaration ; but the manner of expression is dark and highly figurative, for a purpose that the gracious object might not be fully known till the effectual blow is given by the

person destined to conquer the usurper in the seat of his dominion. This is the parable, or rather the commanding word; to which the Messiah is said to incline his ear, in token of submission, and with perfect readiness to accomplish what it dictates; though in so doing he must be environed by evil, and have his footsteps marked with blood. Justly then does the Psalmist call this great mystery his enigma, because it appertained solely to him, he being that seed of whom the promise was made; but whose nature and operations could not be ascertained till the fullness of time came for the display of his powers. The revelation of the mystery, indeed, unfolded itself gradually many ages before the actual event, particularly by the representations of the prophets at sundry times and in divers manners. But the Divine Speaker, in this Psalm, takes upon him to open the secret; that is, he engages to explain the mystic sense, and to perform the part allotted him, which is, to deliver man from the dominion of death, an operation infinitely exceeding all the means and devices of human force and ingenuity. After all the observations and researches that can be made by wisdom, the conclusion of this great question, Whether there is any ransom for the soul, remains the same: "Man being in honour, abideth not; he is like the beasts that perish." Philosophy can go no farther; and even natural religion, as it is falsely called, has never been able to fix the hope of futurity upon any certain basis. Here the glory of the person, concerning whom the parable, or dark saying, was uttered, bursts forth with a blaze of splendour that illuminates the dark recesses of mortality, and lays open the passage of life from the grave. Thus the Expounder of the holy oracle discloses and applies the meaning of that marvellous decree, which he alone could execute and render effectual for the redemption of those in whose cause he voluntarily embarked.

The universality of death being confessed on all hands, and the impossibility of obtaining an exemption from that immutable law being admitted, the representation which follows must be considered as the complete solution of the enigma: "Like sheep are the children of Adam laid in the hidden place, or Sheol, where death shall rule them; but the upright shall have dominion over them in the morning, and their leader shall arise from his dwelling to destroy their prison." The Mighty One, of whom this is predicted, then returns to speak in his own person of the great work which he is to achieve: "God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave (or rather, of the invisible world); for he shall receive me." Such is the conflict, and such is the issue of it in the triumph of man's Substitute over the region of darkness; and the whole was verified when the angel said unto the pious women, who came to see the sepulchre at the dawn of day, "Fear not ye; for I know that ye seek Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here, for he is risen, as he said. Come see the place where the Lord lay." *Matt. xxviii. 5, 6.*

JUNE THE TWENTY-FIFTH.

THE SPIRITUAL TRIUMPH.

Psalm lxxviii. 18.—Thou hast ascended on high; thou hast led captivity captive; thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them.

WE have attended to the promise that the power of the destroyer and the dominion of death should be abolished; and we have just contemplated, through the medium of prophecy, the execution of that gracious decree by the Person of whom it was spoken.

In the present Psalm we are called upon to join the triumphant procession of redeemed souls, who, ascending from the regions of mortality, leave all sin, and doubt, and fear, behind ; while, clad in the robes of light, they unite their voices with the angelical host, and say, " Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered ; let them also that hate him flee before him." That this exquisite piece of divine poetry was written by David, we know ; but the peculiar circumstance to which it was originally adapted, is matter of conjecture. The general opinion is, that it was sung at the removal of the Ark from the house of Obededom to Mount Zion, which seems strengthened by the correspondence of the exordium to the hymn used whenever the Israelites changed their station in the wilderness. But as the deliverance and journeyings of that people were emblematical of another state, the Psalmist, in bringing under review these ancient blessings, does it to set forth the nature of the spiritual kingdom, which was the object of his faith, and of the national expectation. The Jewish church of old always applied to the Messiah the precatory hymn sung at the translation of the ark ; for thus we find it interpreted by the paraphrast : " Be thou revealed now, O Jehovah the Word." When, therefore, this Saviour is called upon to rise and stand up, it must be understood of his people's desire, that he would openly manifest himself, agreeably to the promise given to Adam, for the aid and comfort of his posterity. The Israelites had before them the ark of the covenant, and the wonderful pillar which involved the Divine Glory ; but they looked for something more, and David, in this Psalm, declares that this gracious revelation was yet to come. From the recollection of former mercies, however, and the miracles wrought in Egypt, the Red Sea, and the Wilderness, an assurance was drawn that the Saviour would arise, and that the same Power, at whose presence the earth

shook and Sinai trembled, "would ride upon the heavens (or rather in the remote edge of the horizon), in his name JAH;" which plainly indicated another display of the Divine majesty and goodness, at a period then far distant. The name here determined, as that which should distinguish the revealed Deity, and by which he would be universally acknowledged, is the same with the one specially communicated by the archangel to the Virgin Mother: "Thou shalt bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end." Luke, i. 31—33. The Divine prenomination by the Psalmist, and the assignment of it in the angelical compellation, with the actual appropriation of the name to the infant of Bethlehem, cannot be considered as casual incidents, or the management of craft; for as children were named shortly after their birth, it was impossible that parental partiality could have so anticipated events out of the ordinary course of nature, as purposely to adopt an appellative characteristic of the future man. That this name was to distinguish some person who should make his appearance in a public manner, for the improvement of the moral condition of mankind, is evident from what follows, where the change effected by his influence is compared to the fertility produced after a copious effusion of rain upon a thirsty land. This is afterwards explained in a manner very clear and striking in the original Hebrew, and in the Greek version, though sadly weakened in our Bibles: "Jehovah gave the word, and many were they who evangelized." No language could more aptly express the commencement of the Gospel, nor describe its powerful effects, when, in spite of all opposition, and under every disadvantage,

the preachers of righteousness went forth and spread the truth, "confirming it by signs and wonders done in the name of the Lord Jesus." Acts, iv. 30. Thus did the Saviour "ride upon the heavens," or ascend in the fullness of time, dispelling the darkness of superstition and the shadows of the law; diffusing a steady light upon the inhabitants of the world, and making known the way of life, both to Jew and Gentile, "preaching peace to them who were afar off, and to them that were nigh." Eph. ii. 17: In vain do the powers of the earth confederate to impede his progress, and to prevent the establishment of his kingdom; for their armies flee apace, and nothing can preserve either the high places of the heathen or the temporary institute of Sinai, which must all melt away when God descends in person to fulfill his promises, and to bring life and immortality to light through the Gospel of the incarnate Word. The glory of this dispensation is magnificently described in the joyful service of the celestial hierarchies continually employed in ministering to them who are the heirs of salvation. "The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels; Jehovah is among them as in Sinai, in the holy place." But though spiritual warriors are no doubt the principal characters in this glorious exhibition, and they were indeed actively engaged throughout the great work of redemption, from the annunciation of that event to the completion of it in the ascension of the Messiah, yet this prediction comprehends also the inspired band, which grew up from twelve obscure and unlearned men to be a multitude formidable as the host of God. These angels, or messengers, went forth in the Divine power; and with no other weapons than the force of truth and the demonstration of the Spirit, they succeeded amidst tribulation and distress, persecution and poverty, peril and the sword, in establishing Christianity, to the confusion of Jewish

bigotry and the destruction of Heathen idolatry. From the various agents engaged in this divine work of mercy and wisdom, the prophet, by an elegant transition, turns to address the Universal King, riding with his warlike train over the necks of his enemies, and bringing those who were enthralled by superstition and sin to perfect obedience: "Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive; thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious (or the fallen) also, that the Lord God might dwell, that is, be Shechinized and embodied." That this prediction relates to the manifestation of God in the flesh, which the Apostle lays as the foundation of the Christian church, appears from the account of the proclamation made by the heralds of this great King, that it was the glad tidings concerning the Incarnation; for such is the import of their commission, and so it ought to have been translated, instead of the present very obscure reading, "The Lord gave the word; great was the company of them that published it." But the whole Psalm is a prospective view of the mystery of redemption in its actual accomplishment by the advent of the Messiah, who, conformably to what was here declared of him, rose upon the world with the essential appellative of the Deity as his exclusive property, being so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb; and the explanation of which was thus announced to his reputed father by the same Divine intelligence, "Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins." Matt. i. 21. By virtue of this name his disciples, weak and unlearned as they were in themselves, were enabled to overcome every obstacle which the power and malice of man laid in the way of their ministry; and thus also shall the work so begun be carried on in every age, and under the most unpromising circumstances, till, as the Apostle applies this very promise, "we all come in

the unity of the faith, and of the knowlege of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." Eph. iv. 13.

JUNE THE TWENTY-SIXTH.

THE REIGN OF MESSIAH.

Psalm lxxii. 19.—*Blessed be his glorious name for ever! and let the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen and amen.*

THIS Psalm, which nearly resembles the second both in matter and form, may be properly entitled the Inauguration of Solomon. The nature of the allegory is the same with the former; but the style is somewhat different, on account of the disparity of the subject. In the former are displayed the pomp and splendour of victory; in the other, the placid imagery of peace and felicity. The style of the seventy-second Psalm is therefore more calm and temperate, but more ornamental and figurative; not so replete in the boldness of personification as the second, but rather variegated with the rich and cheerful colouring of nature in its most flourishing and delightful state. From this example some light will be thrown upon the nature of the parabolic style; which in particular appears admirably suited to the mystic allegory, on account of its abounding so profusely in the varieties of pleasing representation. For as the imagery of nature is equally adapted to the expression of divine and spiritual ideas, and of human objects, a particular analogy being observable in each; so it easily admits that degree of ambiguity which seems to be essentially requisite in the figure. Thus the composition by these means becomes strikingly diversified and perspicuous, applicable to both senses, and ob-

secure in neither; while, as it fully comprehends both parts of the allegory, it may be clearly and distinctly applied to one or the other*. But descriptive as this sublime ode is of a just and pacific government, and well as it may comport generally with what is recorded of Solomon's reign, it must strike the reader that there is in some points a considerable diversity between the picture and the history, for which even oriental hyperbolism will hardly be allowed as an apology. The reign of Solomon was indeed remarkable for wealth and power, wisdom and peace; but then it was tarnished by apostasy and dissoluteness; while the kingdom predicted in this piece is described as being uniformly glorious, and distinguished by the Divine favour. The more this prophetic Psalm is considered, the more shall we be convinced that a greater king than Solomon is the object of its praise; for whatever may have been the glory and extent of that monarch's dominion, it bore no proportion to the majesty and universality of the state here delineated. The equity of Solomon's government will hardly be questioned, and the splendour of it cannot be doubted; but good and great as it was for the most part, even the license of poetry would not warrant this description, "His name shall endure for ever, his name shall continue as the sun; and men shall be blessed in him; all nations shall call him blessed." To no earthly sovereign, ancient or modern, Jewish or Christian, can this character be given, because by none was it ever deserved; for though many virtuous princes may have proved a blessing in their respective territories, yet in no sense can it be said of any, that "all nations shall call him blessed." Besides, let the fame of Solomon be as wide and lasting as it may,

* Lowth, *Prælect. de Sacra Poesi Hebræorum*, Pr. xxv. Ed. Michælis.

no religious use has ever been made of his name, though it is expressly affirmed of the person here mentioned, that his name shall be so glorious in this respect, as to unite all the nations of the earth in the worship of him who bears it. Blessing in the name, is in the Scriptural language equivalent to intercession, and denotes both supplication and praise, which being the highest acts of religious service, can be offered only to Jehovah. Of this, indeed, the most learned doctors in the Jewish church were so sensible, that they gave a spiritual interpretation to this very Psalm; because, as they say, the name of the Messiah, mentioned in it, is one of the seven things that preceded the creation of the world. But that the whole is a mystic allegory, appears farther from the benefits foretold, and which by no rhetorical force of expression can be predicated of any earthly ruler: "He shall spare the poor and needy, and shall save the souls of the needy. He shall redeem their soul from death and violence; and precious shall their blood be in his sight." The poor and wretched, the spiritually ignorant and miserable, are indeed the objects of the Messiah's favour; and to them the glad tidings of his coming are so acceptable, that they become the willing subjects of his kingdom. Truly then is affirmed of this eternal Sovereign, that "to him shall be given of the gold of Sheba: prayer also shall be made to him continually; and daily shall he be praised." The king of Israel, it is true, did receive homage from numerous tributaries; and his high reputation brought even great princes, with splendid gifts, to Jerusalem, that they might hear his wisdom. But that this was typical of another royal Personage, endowed with superior knowledge, and possessing a more stable and extended empire, is plain from the prediction that this mighty Sovereign should be addressed continually with prayer and praise; which was so far from being

true of Solomon, that the application of it to him must be at variance with the letter and spirit of all religion. In Him only, of whom that king was a figure, the whole was literally verified, and it will continue to be so till his redeemed ones shall be gathered from all lands, and every soul included in the covenant of mercy is saved from the hand of the oppressor. According to the beautiful imagery of this Psalm, "there shall be a handful of corn in the earth, upon the top of the mountains; the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon; and they of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth." This fullness of the Gospel kingdom, which will take place at the consummation of all things, is making up daily by the growth of the righteous, who, whatever the world may think of them, are the lilies of the field, which increase and multiply, flourish and produce abundantly in the earth, though they are despised, and often persecuted, by the cunning and the powerful; but still of the lowest of this blessed order is it true what Infinite Wisdom hath declared, "Even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." Matt. vi. 29.

JUNE THE TWENTY-SEVENTH.

THE DIVINE VICTORY.

Psalm xci. 13.—*Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder; the young-lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet.*

It may seem extraordinary to cite the enemy of all truth as a commentator; yet the evidence is upon record that the devil was well acquainted with the prophecies, for he quoted them pertinently, while he endeavoured to prevent their accomplishment. The

guilty will often apply language to their own character which was never intended for them ; but from the beginning of revelation the tempter was continually upon the watch to discover what further should be imparted relative to the sentence which threatened his destruction. Knowing that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, he made himself acquainted with these oracles, that he might evade their force, or pervert them to his own evil purposes. When, therefore, the Redeemer came in the flesh, and was exposed to the arts of the deceiver, who felt his Divinity without knowing or being acquainted with his designs, and the extent of his power, this subtle adversary assailed the object of his dread with arguments drawn from the prophecies, evidently that he might discover whether this was the person destined to repair the ruins of the fall, by curbing the power of the usurper.

Ever fearful of the execution of what had been denounced, and aware that the person anointed by the Holy Ghost was declared to be the Son of God, the evil spirit assaulted him under various forms, and desired him, in an insinuating address, to prove his mission, by casting himself down from the battlements of the temple. To induce the meek and lowly Jesus to undertake this venturous trial of his supernatural power, the wily seducer quoted that passage of the Psalm before us, "He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hand, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone." If this presumptuous audacity of Satan excites astonishment, and if any be disposed to inquire what could be the motive of the fiend to make such a proposal, the solution will be readily obtained by attending to the verse which follows, "Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder ; the young lion and dragon shalt thou trample under feet." The author of all mischief knew well

that this was an amplification of the original promise, which doomed him to an excruciation and loss infinitely more degrading and painful than his first prostration: "Upon thy belly shalt thou go; and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy lives. And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed. He shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." The devil, then, like an acute logician, did not go about to deny the Divine authority of the Psalm, but he sought to avoid the accomplishment of it, and accordingly he warily exerted his utmost faculty in discovering who the warrior might be, that, in human nature, was to inflict upon him the mortal wound. For this purpose he contrived to tempt our Lord, by intimating the propriety of his resting upon the declaration here given, that he was perfectly safe in the Divine protection, even if he precipitated himself from the eminence where they then stood, in public view. He did not ask the extraordinary Person with whom he held discourse, whether he was the seed of the woman originally predicted, or the victor described by the Psalmist as treading down by his innate strength the powers of darkness, emblemized by the fiercest and most destructive of all the animal tribes. The reduplication of the promise showed its certainty, and gave assurance of the effectual triumph which the Mighty One should gain over the tremendous being with whom he was to enter the lists. Satan's object was to ascertain the real character of his antagonist, while as yet there might be some chance of perverting him also into an act of disobedience. He confessed, then, by this suggestion, that the Messiah was the subject of the prophetic ode which he quoted; and in asking Jesus to prove his title, he betrayed his apprehensions that the time was now come when the seed of the woman would destroy his dominion, after trampling upon him and

his legions. The allegorical language of Scripture was perfectly comprehended by the enemy of righteousness; and though a liar from the beginning, he had not the folly to deny that he was the old serpent and the dragon, cursed for his seduction of man by the voice of the Almighty, and menaced with greater perdition by the word of prophecy. To such an expounder, then, we may profitably attend, when we find him interpreting and applying those oracular declarations which related to his own malignant works and dismal prospects.

What an excellent divine hath observed upon this prophecy, and on the devil's application of it, is so full to the point, that the reader cannot be otherwise than edified by his remarks. Having mentioned the passage by which the deceiver tried our Lord, the learned writer proceeds: "These words, considered in themselves, contain in figurative language a promise of God's providence and care over that person to whom they are addressed; and might be applied with great propriety to David himself, or to any other good person specially regarded by God. How came the tempter, then, to consider these words as belonging only to him, who was to be the Son of God? From the words themselves he could not collect this; but there was another character in the very next verse, and belonging to the same person, which he could not mistake; for this Person, over whom the angels were to have charge, was 'to tread upon the lion* and adder; and the young lion and the dragon to trample under foot.' He knew by this mark to whom this whole prophecy belonged; he could not forget who was to bruise his head; and though he avoided to ask our Lord directly, whether he was that person who was to bruise his

* The word translated lion, signifies, in the opinion of Bochart, a kind of serpent.

head; yet he did the same thing covertly, by trying whether another part of the prophecy would be owned by him as belonging to himself. If trampling the lion, and the adder, and the dragon, under feet, had meant no more than that the sons of Adam and Eve should now and then destroy the serpents of the field, the tempter would have had no reason to suppose that he, who was to trample on the dragon, was to be the Son of God. If we look into the world, where sin and death seem to rule with absolute dominion, and appear in all the forms of violence, fraud, and iniquity, in distempers without number, and in miseries too many, too affecting to be described; we shall want no other proof of the completion of the first part of the prophecy of the fall. The heel of the seed of the woman has been, and will continue to be, sufficiently bruised, till death, the last enemy, shall be destroyed. On the other side, the children of the kingdom have been redeemed by the blood of Christ, and are training up under the many trials that surround them, by the assistance of God's Holy Spirit, to be heirs of glory and immortality. And the time is hastening when the Son of Man will come forth, "conquering and to conquer;" and shall appear in full power, and in the glory of the Father, to subdue all his enemies. Then shall the "dragon, that old serpent, which is the devil and Satan," be fast bound, "and cast into the lake of fire and brimstone:" and the judgments of God denounced against the wickedness of men having their completion, "every curse shall cease." Then shall the loss of

* *Kai ta panta ta eni tui kosmi*. The rendering in our translation is, "And there shall be no more curse;" as if the words contained an assurance against any new curse. But the true meaning is, that every curse should cease; that the curse of the fall, which had been working in all generations, and all others brought upon the earth, should be

the fall be repaired, Paradise be restored, and the tree of life shall yield her fruit again; and the leaves thereof shall be "for the healing of the nations *."

JUNE THE TWENTY-EIGHTH.

THE SONG OF TRIUMPH.

Psalm xcvi. i.—*O come, let us sing unto the Lord;
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our
salvation.*

THOUGH the Psalms are more familiarized to us by the devotional use which is properly made of them, than any other part of the Sacred Volume, it is to be feared that these sublime compositions are but little understood, even by many serious readers, who repeat them daily, and are well conversant with the entire collection. "Could indeed these be inaptations, and depraved his judgement, that is, the sense of the beauty of the Hebrew original, which is lost in it appears under all the different versions, and is translated into languages, which are too remote and languid to equal its vehemence, or are too confined and measured adequately to express the splendour of its imagery. But the principal cause why these heavenly lyrics lose so much of their effect is this, that as most readers go no farther than the literal sense, they miss that spirit which gives life to the song, and renders it as comfortable and instructive to the Christian, as it was to the Jewish church. If some of these odes attract admiration on account of their

utterly extinguished, in consequence of the entire defeat of the old serpent and the victory of the Son of Man.

* Bishop Sherlock on the Use and Intent of Prophecy, Appendix, p. 305, ed. 1749.

peculiar sublimity, others embarrass the mind by their obscurity; and even in those Psalms which charm the soul by the energetic display of the Divine goodness, and teach it to rely upon the promises of God with full assurance of faith, not a few difficulties occur from the abrupt transitions to circumstances and institutions, that seem to have no connexion with the general subject. But most, if not all of these perplexities, arise from the want of considering the whole collection in a prophetic light; as referring to another dispensation, of which the history and ordinances of Israel were mere types or figurative signs. Now as it is only by making these compositions our own, that we can derive any spiritual light and consolation from them, to do this we must, in the language of a very pious writer, "substitute the Messiah for David, the Gospel for the law, the church for Israel, our Lord for the Father, and the enemies of the church for the enemies of the other *." By considering the Psalms in this manner, we are enabled to see in view, and looking upon the sufferings of Christ, and the mercies here celebrated as pre-announcing much greater blessings, which belong to us, even the complaints and imprecations, uttered with the bitterness of sorrow and the vehemence of resentment, will be edifying, as predictive of the sufferings of Christ and the destruction of his adversaries. Thus in the evangelical application of the Psalms, we shall find our faith strengthened by the continual enlargement of Divine knowledge; which will contribute equally to the comfort of our minds, in every vicissitude of life, and to the right direction of our practice in the way of holiness; for one excellence of a peculiar kind distinguishes these holy songs, that while they are pur-

* See Preface to Bishop Horne's invaluable Commentary, p. xxvii.

posedly written for the use of the church in her public assemblies; they are also adapted to the particular use of every individual in his solitary hours of meditation and prayer, study and business. When, therefore, we are engaged in repeating these inspired compositions during the service of the sanctuary, we may most profitably turn them all into matter of prayer and thankfulness, suited to our own case and condition; because there is nothing in the whole collection but what relates to that great salvation, in which we have all a common interest. To mention in one instance only, the ninety-fifth Psalm is that which most frequently occurs in our public devotions, and wisely has it been chosen to take the lead of the other hymns, because this, more than all the rest, states and explains the covenant by which we are enabled to plead the privilege assured to believers in the word of prophecy. This delightful poem begins with a mutual call and resolution to come before Jehovah with a song of praise, and to rejoice in his presence, because he is the Rock of our Salvation. The Gospel is tidings of great joy to all people, so that they who wandered in darkness, error, and iniquity, are hereby brought to the light of eternal truth, and created anew of God in Christ Jesus. On this account the hymn proceeds to express the gratitude of redeemed sinners towards Him who ruleth over all the orders of intelligences, whether they are the angels that delight to do his will or the demons that oppose it, and in whose hands are the recesses of the invisible world no less than the various regions of the earth; from whom the mighty derive their strength, and who controuls and directs universal nature. Well, therefore, are we invited to bow and kneel before the Divine Majesty of this tremendous and self-existent Being; but this we are more particularly called upon to do, because he is in a near and special manner our Maker and Lord.

We were dead, and he hath revived us; we were lost, and he hath mercifully sought us out in that state of misery to which the fall of the first man reduced all his posterity; but this Jehovah is now "our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand." This is indeed the most powerful reason why we should assemble together in the courts of his house, and offer the sacrifice of our hearts with one accord, in his praise who hath "delivered us from the hand of our enemies, that we might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life." Luke, i. 74, 75. Being then saved from death, and renewed to divine life by this Almighty Redeemer, we are become his subjects, and as such are addressed in the second part of the Psalm, which, while it confirms our faith and encourages our devotion, warns us against forfeiting the blessing we have obtained. Thus the Divine Speaker does by reminding us of what happened to the chosen people, who, although he tempted and prove him, forty years in the wilderness, yet, notwithstanding the abundant proofs which he gave of his Divinity, the heart of Israel remained hardened; so that, instead of acknowledging his ways, or confessing him to be their Lord, by following him in the course which he pointed out, they sealed their dereliction by crucifying the Lord of Life. Well, therefore, are we warned in this Psalm to avoid their fate, by making a due improvement of our day, which means the bright and glorious period of Christianity, the last dispensation of light and immortality from God to man. And what is thus addressed to the collective body of those who make up the outward and visible church, must of course be an urgent and pressing caution to every individual who comes within hearing of the joyful sound; and so the

whole prophetic hymn is justly interpreted, and solemnly applied by an evangelical expositor: "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily while it is called to-day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." Heb. iii. 12, 13.

JUNE THE TWENTY-NINTH.

THE EXTENT OF REDEMPTION.

Psaln cx. 8.—Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness; from the womb of the morning thou hast the dew of thy youth;

THAT this description of the Messiah, cannot be doubted, and that it describes it to David, and that it is a prophecy of that king to be compared with the king predicted. Thus, if we had not the assistance of a skilful interpreter for the application of it to another person, it would appear evident that the whole description belongs to some higher objects than worldly splendour, and the conquests of temporal sovereigns. No language, poetical or prophetic, would ever take such a lofty flight as to exalt any mortal king to a participation in the throne of the Most High; yet it is obvious that the Ruler, whose praise and dominion constitute the entire theme of this poem, obtains a seat at the right hand of God, where he administers justice, subdues enemies, and by the power of the Spirit gathers subjects, innumerable as the drops of morning dew. Here is an accumulation of images which opens to the mind an immeasurable scene of glory, in which, though many parts are easily to be compre-

hended, others are so august, brilliant, and extended, as to render it utterly impossible for the imagination so to enlarge its views as to form an adequate conception of the mighty empire. When the father of the faithful received the covenant of promise, he was told that the stars which he beheld in that cloudless hemisphere should not exceed in number the line of his posterity; and that the seed emphatically to proceed from him, and in or by whom all the nations of the earth were to be blessed, should "possess the gate of his enemies." Gen. xxii. 17. This declaration corresponds with that which is here made by Jehovah to the king of Zion, "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness; from the womb of the morning thou hast the dew of thy youth." Dark and confused as this reading is, it so far conveys the sense of the original, as to show that the kingdom here foretold will not only be immensely populous, but, what can hardly be affirmed of any earthly community, that all this countless multitude will be actuated by sentiments of loyalty, and distinguished by holiness. It must be confessed, indeed, that the passage is one of those which, from their native difficulty, have so strangely embarrassed translators and critics; that their attempts at explanation, instead of clearing the sense, have increased the perplexity. The vulgar Latin, by partly following the Greek, has made a perfect enigma of the prediction in this strange manner, "The beginning was with thee, the day of thy virtue, in the splendour of the saints: I have begotten thee from the womb, before the morning star." As the original gives no warrant to this very remarkable reading, it must be dismissed, to take place with other superfluities, which pious zeal or officious criticism has endeavoured to foster upon the Sacred Oracles. The style of these writings is indeed richly metaphorical, so that the same object is frequently

represented under various figures, that seem to have no possible affinity; yet when they are separately and carefully examined, it will be found that they have all an appropriate beauty, and a material connexion with the business of the piece in which they are introduced. This appears to be the case in the passage under consideration, the literal construction of which may be as follows: "Thy multitude shall come to thee freely in the day of muster; beauteous in holiness from the opening from the dawning, thy youth is to thee as the dew." Thus the state described in this Psalm may be characterized as made up of the regal, the military, and the sacerdotal. We see here a king, who is both a warrior and a priest; whose throne is in heaven, but whose reign extends over all lands and through all generations; who judges the nations, and destroys their idols; whose progress is gradual, though with formidable opposition, but his victory is final, and his dominion universal. But how glorious must be his exploits, and vast his empire, who, as a merciful sovereign is obliged to pass through a various course of trial, figured here by "his dwelling of the brook in the way," which denotes his submission to all the sinless infirmities of man's nature in the lowest state of humiliation, before he can become "the head over all things, to the church, which is his body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all." Ephes. i. 22, 23. This comprehensive view of the Psalm enables us to ascertain both the person to whom the prophecy relates, and the precise signification of the passage, where his subjects are introduced as multiplying from an insignificant number to a countless host. The dayspring, or morning light, is a prophetic appellation of the Messiah, and one more beautiful could not have been adopted, as being most expressive of the moral state of the world before and after his advent. The church, in the legal dispensation,

was continually looking out for the coming of her Redeemer, and saying, "I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope. My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning." Ps. cxxx. 5, 6. Hence we find, that as the fullness of time drew nigh, there were devout persons, both men and women, who, by an attentive examination of the prophecies, had such an insight into them as to look daily for the consolation of Israel. By these holy watchers the wonderful Infant was hailed with rapture when he made his appearance in the temple, and one of the venerable saints thus breathed out his thankfulness, that he had lived to witness the breaking of that day which was never to end till the whole earth should be filled with the Saviour's glory: "Now, Lord, lettest thou thy servant depart in peace according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation." Luke, ii. 29, 30.

From the day of his manifestation in the flesh, till his return to the right hand of the Majesty on high, the dew of the Saviour's grace continued to descend; though it was upon a desert which profited little by the blessing. A few disciples, indeed, were gathered to him; but they were in destitute of influence to recommend a new system of religion, as they were void of the learning and ingenuity necessary to shake old prejudices and customs. Yet, armed with Divine power, and full of the Holy Ghost, these willing champions went forth, with nothing before them but poverty and suffering, labour and persecution, to propagate the doctrine of the cross; which, in spite of all opposition from proud philosophers and an interested priesthood, spread far and wide; carrying the glad tidings of life and immortality into the regions of pagan darkness, overturning idolatry, even in the very temples, and confuting the wisdom of the sophists in the schools of science. Thus the faint light which dawned upon Judea, increased till it

spread over the Roman empire, and following the order of Providence in the civilization of man, it penetrated into every part of the known world; not only unaided by any human art or power, but even with every disadvantage arising from the jealousy and cruelty of the established authorities, which were every where exerted to prevent its progress. Nor will the prophecy, which began to be fulfilled in the ministration of those who received their commission immediately from the risen Saviour, ever fail to be without witnesses; but it will go on gathering fresh proofs continually of its Divine authority and accomplishment, till the whole is completed by the voice of the triumphant church in heaven, saying, "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ: and he shall reign for ever and ever." *Rev. xi. 15.*

JUNE THE THIRTIETH.

THE PERFECTION OF BEAUTY.

Psaln cxxxiii. 1.—Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!

WHEN our blessed Lord was approaching his last conflict, he prepared the minds of his disciples for the stormy scene of trouble and separation, by an act of condescension, and by laying down a law, of which that act was an attainable example, "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another." *John, xiii. 34.* This precept is called new, not because the sentiment of friendly affection was then for the first time inculcated, but because it was enforced upon a principle, and recommended

by a motive hitherto unknown. The members of this community were enjoined to love one another, as partakers of the same grace, and with a sympathetic feeling, corresponding in some sense to that by which one portion of the animal frame imparts the sensation of pain or pleasure to the rest. "By this," says the living Head, "shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another;" and truly, for in this manner only could they exhibit the evidences of that vitality, which is derived from a union with Him who is emphatically called the Tree of Life. Thus the commandment is not only new, but immutable and universal; eternal in its obligation, and imperative upon all who bear the Christian name, of whatever condition and wherever situated; whether "high or low, rich or poor," because the same Lord is the "Maker of them all." Prov. xxii. 2. That man should be actuated by a spirit of liberality towards all of his own kind, is a moral rule, which the very heathen have generally acknowledged; and their pages have admirably explained; but the Gospel precept goes infinitely beyond their most refined ethics, by the injunction that we should "love one another as Christ hath loved us." This divine benignity, which we are called upon to make the model of our tempers, and by which we are to regulate our conduct, was the spontaneous disposition of a mind to save beings ignorant of their own wretched state; and an offer of submission, on his part, to endure the extremity of misery in their nature, that he might restore them to the favour of God, and raise them to a state of perfection and happiness. The objects of this unparalleled beneficence, so far from possessing any virtue to recommend them, were, on the contrary, all defiled by sin, and had no inclination of themselves to be delivered out of that darkness and corruption in which they were fallen. Whatever traditionary notices any of them might have had of a

more exalted condition, or glimmering perceptions of those duties which could alone prepare men for another life; they had no means of attaining the pardon of conscious guilt, or of acquiring that holiness, "without which no man shall see the Lord." Heb. x i. 14. Such were the persons towards whom the Saviour extended his compassion, in the effectual manifestation of which it was necessary, according to the mysterious plan of the Divine government, that he should suffer a voluntary degradation, and pass through the varieties of active humanity, to bring in for them everlasting righteousness. Well, therefore, might he say to his followers, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit," for had they possessed the power to will, or to do any thing towards this great work, it would have abated from the fullness of his love and goodness, as well as from the value of his redemption. But now, to use the language of the Apostle, "when we were without strength, Christ died for us ungodly" (Rom. v. 6); the reason of the divine government is made sufficiently clear, that as he loved us when we were sinners, so ought our affection to be exercised, not only towards all who live in the household of faith, but to them also who are still dead in trespasses and sins.

This bond of union, which forms the excellence of the Gospel, was spoken of in the ancient prophecies under various forms, and represented in several expressive figures. In one place, the Church so collected out of all lands, and cemented together by the power of the Divine Spirit, is called the "Perfection of Beauty," because the presence of God shines through its ministrations, "gathering his saints together unto him; those that have made a covenant with him by sacrifice." Ps. l. 2, 5. The Psalm before us compresses in a small compass all the

elegance and sweetness that can be supposed to distinguish such a holy community, cemented by one gracious sentiment, which no time can weaken nor caprice destroy. It is an exact delineation of that society, which, founded upon faith in the Redeemer, and sanctified by his Spirit, was in its infancy so distinguished by fraternal concord as to excite even the admiration of the pagan world, who exclaimed with wonder, "Behold, how these Christians love one another!" The royal prophet compares this blessed family to things which may appear very dissimilar; but, according to the use that is here made of them, they serve forcibly to illustrate the principle of evangelical harmony, in its cause and effects. This Spring, which is the essence of the communion of saints, resembles the odoriferous mixture that, poured upon the head of the high-priest, flowed in copious streams over all his garments, and filled the whole sacred building with its grateful perfume. Thus the grace by which we are made acceptable to God, and profitable to each other, as members of his Church, is derived solely from the merits of the Saviour and the gift of the Spirit. We have these in common; so that whatever excellences may distinguish individuals, they are indebted for it to Him who "giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not." James, i. 5. But whatever they so receive from the Fountain of Holiness and Wisdom is for the general benefit; and of this the prophet was sensible, when he described the blessing of unity as resembling the copious "dew of Hermon descending upon the mountains of Zion;" the showers of which are equally refreshing to the inhabitants and beneficial in promoting vegetation. Man is not born for himself, but he is placed in a world, and among connexions, which render it necessary for him to exert his bodily and mental faculties in the service of his fellow-creatures, if he expects to obtain assistance from them in the higher concerns of

religion : this is more especially the province and the duty of him who has been brought into the liberty of the sons of God ; for the Christian life is a state of warfare and of labour, which cannot be carried on to a successful issue without unity, obedience, and circumspection. Let us, then, as we value our privileges in this world, and our hopes of acceptance in the other, attend constantly to the declaration of Him who is the way, the truth, and the life : " If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love ; even as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love." John, xv. 10. .

JULY THE FIRST.

THE CHARACTER OF WISDOM.

Proverbs, i. 5, 6.—*A wise man will hear, and will increase learning ; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels ; to understand a proverb, and the interpretation ; the words of the wise and their dark sayings.*

THIS invaluable treasury of Divine instruction contains rules for the conduct of life in every age and condition, suited to all the circumstances in which man can be placed, and equally adapted to one country as to another. But the collection seems to be regarded by too many in no higher light than as a miscellany of mere moral aphorisms and acute observations ; the fruits of long experience and the gleanings of ancient wisdom. The title, indeed, which is given in our Bibles to these words of the wise and their dark speeches, carries the mind no farther than to the consideration of a body of ethics, comprized in positive axioms of fixed authority and directions of general interest and utility. But the original

inscription conveys the idea of something more extensive, when it denominates the contents of this book, commanding sentences, or judicial decrees; which, according to the preliminary discourse, require a closer application and deeper study to understand, than could properly be said of mere adages or proverbs, whose very character is clearness and simplicity. Now the solemnity of this introduction would ill suit the following subjects, if they were no more than a set of sententious remarks upon human life and manners, monitions for the government of the passions, and precepts for the regulation of the conduct. Such maxims and cautions are no doubt abundant, and to such a degree that an entire system of morality might be compiled from this book alone; but it can only be rendered effectual and perfect by a knowledge of the principle which runs through the whole, under the emphatic name of wisdom. The qualifications necessary for this study, and the effects of a proper application and perseverance, are stated in a manner sufficient to show that the science here treated of is both recondite and prudential: "A wise man will hear, and will increase learning: and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels; to understand a proverb and the interpretation, the words of the wise and their dark sayings." The intricate matter of doctrine, which the royal teacher calls a proverb, he immediately afterwards terms a dark speech, to understand the interpretation of which we must diligently attend to the words of the wise. These obscure sayings, then, are not plain truths, concerning the obligations of man and his relative duties, but mysteries of spiritual import, that require the explication of inspired wisdom. This very chapter exhibits one of these mystic secrets, in the allegorical representation of a state whose inhabitants are so sunk in depravity and infidelity, as not only to reject the call of Wisdom, here

personified in the most amiable form, but lying in wait for the innocent, and delighting in the prospect of being glutted with the blood of their victim.

When we contemplate this extraordinary scene of wickedness, and hear the voice of wisdom inviting the sinners, without effort, to turn from their evil ways, and to receive the cleansing and healing virtue of the Spirit, here compared to a copious stream flowing from an inexhaustible fountain, perhaps our thoughts may be carried forwards to that "last and great day of the feast, when Jesus stood, and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. But this spake he of the Spirit which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified." John, vii. 37—39. That Solomon delineated the character of a people, and their obdurate malignity in the day of meritorious visitation, is evident from the denunciations of judgment which are pronounced against them for their treachery and ingratitude: "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at naught all my counsel, and would none of my reproof; I also will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh." The Divine Speaker contrasts the fate of these unbelievers and persecutors with the condition of the obedient and faithful disciples: "For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them. But whose hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from the fear of evil." In the sacred language, the word wisdom of God had the same signification, and denoted Him "by whom the worlds were made; who is substantially the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person." Heb. i. 2, 3. The

manifestation of this Divine Intelligence, under a visible form, to enlighten the minds of men with the knowledge of God, to rescue them from the thralldom of sin and ignorance, and to "open the ways of pleasantness and the paths of peace," which lead "to the tree of life," is the great subject of this book. It is laid down as an established principle, that "knowledge and understanding," by which is meant intellectual light; and the love, as well as the means of spiritual improvement, can be obtained from no other source than that wisdom which cometh from the Lord. The wise man, then, is he who hears the voice of this Director with docile submission, and an eager desire to profit by his counsels; who yields his reason wholly to the guidance of this Divine teacher, and having made an entrance into what the Apostle calls the hidden mystery of wisdom, is continually making the highest advances in the school of holy wisdom. The Lord made an application of the character of the wise man by Solomon to himself, when he rebuked the perverseness of the Pharisees, who rebuked his precursor for the austerity of his life, and censured him for his liberality. "But," said he; "Wisdom is justified of her children" (Matt. xii. 19); that is, whatever may be objected to this religion by the pride of reason, the uncharitableness of superstition, and the prejudice of bigotry; the evidences of its truth and excellence shall appear in the spirit and deportment of those who are "begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." 1 Peter, i. 3. The wisdom which descended from above is necessarily opposed to that of the world; and therefore all those who are devoted to the pursuit of the knowledge here revealed, must expect to meet with a portion of the treatment experienced by Him who came to impart it; but they have this promise to rest upon in all their crosses and difficulties, "I lead

in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment; that I may cause those that love me to inherit substance; and I will fill their treasures." Prov. viii. 20, 21.

JULY THE SECOND.

THE BENEFITS OF WISDOM.

Proverbs, viii. 17.—*I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me.*

AMONG the sayings of Solomon is one which beautifully describes the nature of that parabolical mode of instruction, so remarkably abundant in the ministry of the great Teacher who came from God, and who "taught the people in a parable authority, and not as the scribes." Matt. xiii. 10. "A word fitly spoken," observes the apostle, "is like apples of gold in pictures of silver." This allusion is thus well explained by a Jewish sage of considerable ingenuity: "These parables are sculptures, or works of silver, perforated in places. By the apples of gold is to be understood the spiritual sense, and the exterior is so contrived as to attract the attention to the valuable objects within. For as the golden fruits in the silver casket, if carefully seen through the apertures, will not be distinguished from the vessel that contains them; so, when keener and more accurately inspected, the network discloses the hidden treasures; and the desire of more knowledge is thereby excited or increased. Thus in the parables of the sacred penmen, the apparent sense contains excellent lessons, of great utility in civil life; but within is that inestimable wisdom which teaches us what ought to be chiefly believed and prized in the science of religious truth. These prophetic parables are of two

kinds. In one sort, every single word has some significant allusion or counterpart. There are others again, in which the whole allegory is expressive of the internal sense; but amidst the copiousness of language, all the words have not any particular reference to the main subject; some of them serving merely for the purpose of elegant composition, or are used to involve and hide the enigma, the diction being subservient to the nature of the subject*." This illustration will apply not only to the allegorical descriptions contained in the prophetic books, but to the speeches delivered in the name of Wisdom, and collected by the piety of the king of Israel. In the divine discourse, where the heavenly Visitant speaks in person, and calls man to the path of duty, the nature of the blessing to which he is invited is set forth under the representation of treasures, far exceeding in value the riches of the East. "Happy is the man that loveth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding; for the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than that of gold; she is more precious than rubies; and all the things that men desire are not to be compared unto her. Now, though all this may be true of knowledge in general, when it is properly pursued and rightly improved, the encomium of Solomon has a more distinct and definite object, concerning which he says, "Length of days is in her right-hand; and in her left-hand riches and honour." This surely cannot be affirmed of human science, for the discoveries of genius have never yet extended so far as the prolongation of life; nor has learning afforded any security against the evils of poverty and the attacks of persecution. The wise saying, then, must be understood in a higher sense; and while it is an encouragement to diligence, in the cultivation of the

* Maimonides, More Nevochim, in Pref.

mind, it sets before us an infinite and immutable blessing, which we should seek with the avidity of merchants, who, in eastern countries, travel from kingdom to kingdom in quest of gain. What this is, we learn from that Divine Instructor, who, by the confession of his adversaries, "spake as never man did;" and who in one of his parables expressed in similar terms the superlative excellence of his Gospel, and the indispensable necessity of sacrificing all other considerations for an interest in that redemption which it offers to man, "without money and without price." *Ls. iv. 1.*

"Again," said our Lord to his disciples, "the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchantman seeking goodly pearls; who when he had found one of great price, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it." *Matt. xiii. 45, 46.*

The aim of this trading adventurer is that ruling desire which prevails in every human heart, but is the source of endless disappointment, from the moment it is not properly directed. One man conceives that there is nothing better than the indulgence of sensual pleasures, which fade with the enjoyment; another, thinking that it lies in riches, binds up all his faculties, his time, and affections to the accumulation of wealth, which increases his cares and narrows his sentiments; while many labour with painful anxiety and incessant attention to make themselves conspicuous in the world, to establish a name, and to gain a commanding influence by their power or reputation, which fails almost as soon as it is acquired, and leaves the votaries of ambition the prey of envy, malice, and discontent. There are many pearls in what may be termed the moral mart, and all of them have their appropriate value and utility; but there is only one of great price, which can truly enrich the possessor, and render him happy both in time and for ever. All the delights and treasures, the honour and wis-

dōm, which can be had from created things, must necessarily be fleeting, because man is a progressive being, and his life is continually varying till he enters upon that state where the world of sense and vanity shall be known no more. There is, however, an attainment which will abide always, in every age, and under all circumstances; which has no dependence upon the caprice of mankind, and cannot be affected by the changes of mortality. This is that pearl which on another occasion our Lord says is the "one thing needful," or so requisite to constitute a man virtuous and wise, that whatever may be his other qualifications, without this he is "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." Rev. iii. 17. This principle of substantial good is faith in Christ, as our only Saviour, through whom we have the pardon of sin, and by whose grace we grow up to eternal life; or, in the metaphorical language of Scripture, become "trees of righteousness, which God hath planted." Happy are they who imbibe this spiritual knowledge in their early years, who seek the sun of righteousness in the morning of their days, and increase in all virtue and wisdom, before sensual pursuits have vitiated the mind, or the folly of the world has gained an ascendancy in the understanding. Religion alone gives delight in the enjoyment of temporal blessings, because it moderates the indulgence by reason, and regulates all things in subserviency to the living principle of sanctification.

The very word wisdom denotes taste and appetite, which he only can be said to possess in perfection who has the complete command over his passions, and is never cloyed by inordinate gratification. Let us then, as we value our present health and desire eternal felicity, keep this counsel continually in view: "My son, eat thou honey, because it is good; and the honeycomb, which is sweet to thy taste: so shall the knowledge of wisdom be unto thy soul;

when thou hast found it, then there shall be a reward, and thy expectation shall not be cut off." Prov. xxiv. 13, 14.

JULY THE THIRD.

THE PROPHECY OF AGUR.

Proverbs, xxx. 4.—*Who hath ascended up into heaven or descended? Who hath gathered the wind in his fists? Who hath bound the waters in a garment? Who hath established all the ends of the earth? What is his name, and what is his Son's name, if thou canst tell?*

THESE questions make part of the words of Agur, the son of Jakeh, of whom no other memorial is recorded than what is contained in the appendage to the Book of Proverbs. But the title of this brief collection of his wise sayings is important, for it expressly calls the whole a prophecy, which the man of God dictated to certain scribes or companions, named Ithiel and Ucal. This Agur, who, according to his own account, had no pretensions to human learning, seems to have lived in the declension of the divided kingdoms; for the picture which he draws of the national depravity, corresponds remarkably with that exhibited in the prophecy of Amos, who flourished in the reigns of Uzziah king of Judah, and Jeroboam, the son of Joash, king of Israel. The name of Agur has acquired celebrity chiefly on account of his moderation in the choice of a middle state, and the reasons assigned by him for that preference. But his merits were of a higher degree than they have been commonly estimated; for his remains, though compressed in a small space, and classed with writings usually considered as little more

than didactic aphorisms, carry internal evidence of the prophetic character, and that in a style of mixed sublimity and plainness, descriptive and hieroglyphic. If we deprive Agur of his rank as a prophet, it will be difficult to account for the admission of his sayings into the Sacred Canon, since they are too enigmatic for moral instruction; and the symbolical language is so obscure that the emblems cannot be applied to any practical purposes in the conduct of life. His introductory questions on the Divine Majesty are indeed parallel to what we read in other parts of the Sacred Writings; but then here are some interrogations which directly point to a particular connexion between God and man, and to the appearance of the Deity in a visible form, with relation to time and place. To the first demand of Agur the most complete answer hath been given by Him who fulfilled all that is inquired in the rest, by controuling the winds and the waves, and holding absolute dominion over all the ends of the earth. That Word, by whom all things were made, is reproving a master of Israel, or one of the public instructors of the people, for his ignorance of religious principles, said, "If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not; how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man, which is in heaven." John, iii. 12, 13. The truths which astonished Nicodemus were these, that man in his natural state is dead to all spiritual knowledge, and the use of his faculties in the service of God; that before he can have any perception of Divine things, his mind must be brought into a state of child-like simplicity; so that being emptied of all pride, it may be prepared for the operation of grace. The figurative illustration used by our Lord; this teacher of the people took in a literal sense, though the Scriptures with which he was conversant had expressed the

same doctrines by similar imagery. Seeing then that his visitor was so imperfectly acquainted with the interior meaning of the Sacred Oracles, and that even the elementary principles of the Divine science were unknown to this master of Israel, the blessed Jesus plainly told him there were still higher mysteries than these, and such as he would find indicated in the recorded sayings of men who had spoken of that wisdom which cometh from God. But, as he observed, if the doctrine of a new life was so difficult, that of the incarnation of the Word must be incomprehensible; yet the fact was certain, and so therefore maintained, in unequivocal language, that what Agur asked was now accomplished, in the descent of Him, who, as the Son of Man, had an actual residence upon earth, while in his essential Divinity he penetrated all space. That the questions of Agur applied to the subject of a personal manifestation of the Father in the human form, is plain from the terms of the question and distinction with which he closes his inquiry: "Having described the glory of the Christ, and his attributes of power and goodness, the prophet then asks, "What is his name, and what is his office?" "if thou canst tell?" Here then are two questions in the alliance of paternity and filiation, concerning each of whom it is affirmed that he has a distinctive appellation, the knowledge of which constitutes the important branch of Divine Intelligence. The declaration of Agur must have this meaning to be intelligible, and all the sophistry of the schools cannot force any other construction upon words, which are more expressly determined by being put in the interrogatory form. The Divine names made an inconsiderable part of theological study in the Hebrew Church; and it is well known, with what reverence the appellative expressions of self-existence, was uniformly regarded, so that any light or indifferent use of it was considered

as an act of sacrilege. Yet this ineffable name, denoting the infinite essence, which is peculiarly Divine, was given to the Redeemer by special communication from heaven; and he did himself assume it in the direct term, which the Jews perfectly understood, and endeavoured to murder him for it, when he said in the temple "Before Abraham was I AM." John, viii. 58.

In this manifestation of the divine nature was the dark oracle delivered by Agur fulfilled, as well as the four wonderful things, which even to him were inexplicable; and thus we find that these wise sayings involve truths of the deepest import, without the knowledge of which the whole Bible will be no better than a sealed book; for as our Lord said to his doubting disciples, "What and if ye shall see the Son of Man ascend up where he was before? It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." John, vi. 62, 63.

JULY THE FOURTH.

THE VANITY OF SCIENCE.

Ecclesiastes, i. 17.—*I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly; I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit.*

THAT this book was the composition of Solomon, is evident from the character which the preacher gives of his pursuits and the splendour of his condition. The whole work may be considered as a body of lectures, delivered by the royal orator upon the most important topics that can engage a thinking man. For an account of the wisdom of this great prince we are referred, by the historian of his reign,

to "the Book of the Acts of Solomon;" but as nothing with that title is known, it may be no unreasonable conjecture to suppose that this was the very collection alluded to, since it contains not only a view of Solomon's grandeur, but the result of his immense labour and numerous inquiries. The picture which he draws of human nature in all its forms and relations, is certainly mortifying to the pride of man's wisdom; but the accuracy of his researches into the complex varieties of the moral world, and the justice of his conclusions, cannot be controverted. There are indeed many abstract propositions in these discourses, which have at first sight the appearance of being either paradoxical decisions, or the gloomy inferences of an impatient and dissatisfied judgment. But when the general fervour of these confessions is kept in view, we shall find that, obscure as many things are in so ancient and comprehensive a performance, still there is an admirable connexion of parts throughout the whole; so that every point has a bearing to the great argument, which is to prove the necessity of a future state and a superintending Providence. To do this effectually, it was requisite that all objections should be answered, arising from the perplexities and troubles, the visible irregularities and confusion of events which occur within the sphere of our present observation. Solomon, like a skilful operator, enters upon the painful task of analysing the mind of man; whence he shows that all "the vanity and vexation of spirit," so universally complained of, must be ascribed to our own erroneous apprehensions, and the contracted limits of the human understanding. In the discussion of this momentous subject it was obviously necessary that the lecturer should examine the several objects which occupy the attention of mankind in the pursuit of happiness; and this is here done with an acuteness of penetration and fidelity of report, that cannot fail to

be confirmed in every age and station of life by him who will take the pains of comparing the observations of the royal moralist with his own experience. There is one particular, however, which to some may seem inconsistent with what is said of the advantages of knowledge in the other writings of this sage counsellor, and with the praise bestowed upon him for his choice of wisdom at the commencement of his reign. Notwithstanding all these encomiums, we find Solomon, in the very opening of this philosophical discourse, pronouncing what may be regarded as a dissuasive from study, and a condemnation of human learning: "In much wisdom is much grief, and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow." But the declaration of this illustrious son of Wisdom, must be considered with reference to the great end of our being, and not as a censure upon the desire of mental improvement. The science of which Solomon speaks in this place, is not naturally productive of grief and sorrow, but becomes the means of disquietude, like every thing else, when our hopes and resolutions are directed to that alone for satisfaction. If there is any one earthly pursuit which can be justly entitled to unmixed praise and unqualified recommendation, it surely is that of which the wisest among the sons of men has delivered this mortifying judgment, that it is, after all nothing better than "vexation of spirit." Is this opinion, then, at variance with the advice and example of Solomon? and after all the exhortations which are held out to us, as rational beings, to explore the works of God, are we told that contented ignorance is more conducive to happiness than the enlargement of the mind by the constant application of its faculties? Nothing of this kind is to be gathered from the argument; and the application of the inference to the encouragement of idleness, would be a miserable perversion of Solomon's meaning, and a wicked

abuse of the word of God. Learning is not merely an ornament, but it is necessary to the useful purposes of life, and as a qualification for the proper discharge of those duties which we owe to our Maker and to one another. God hath made all his works to be sought out and remembered by those creatures to whom he hath given the spirit of rational intelligence. Now this cannot be done without intense thought and continued application, much anxiety and frequent disappointment. The career of learning, like all other laborious employments, is attended with many cares; and even when a man has acquired what his contemporaries regard with astonishment, the possessor himself is discontented, because he knows so little that can be applied to any practical purposes. Like the woman in the Gospel, the mere man of learning is encumbered about many things; but while he is busied in providing for the information and entertainment of others, he neglects that which can alone give content and pleasure to his own soul. What Solomon so strongly censures, then, is the insatiable thirst after fresh attainments in knowledge, which is of little profit in the present life, and of no advantage beyond it. His observations apply to the study which is a continual weariness of the flesh without producing any permanent satisfaction, and the vanity of which is thus forcibly described by a very ingenious writer: "It is with the mind, as with the will and appetites: for as, after we have tried a thousand pleasures, and turned from one enjoyment to another, we find no rest to our desires, till we at last fix them upon the sovereign good; so in pursuit of knowledge, we meet with no tolerable satisfaction to our minds, till, after we are wearied with tracing other methods, we turn them at last upon the one supreme and unerring truth. And were there no other use of human learning, there is at least this in it; that by its many

defects it brings the mind to a sense of its own weakness, and makes it more readily, and with greater willingness, submit to revelation. God may have so ordered it in his wise providence, thereby to keep us in a constant dependence upon himself, and under a necessity of consulting him in his word; which, since profane men treat so neglectfully already, they would have it in greater contempt, and it would be much more vile in their eyes, did they find any thing within them equally perfect, which might guide them in their course, and bring them to the haven where they would be. But this, since they do not meet with it, ought to wean them from an opinion of themselves, and incline them to seek out satisfaction somewhere else, and to take shelter where it may be found*."

JULY. THE FIFTH.

DIVINE PHILOSOPHY.

Ecclesiastes, iii. 11.—He hath made every thing beautiful in his time; also he hath set the world in their heart; so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end.

IN the preceding part of this discourse the royal preacher takes a rapid survey of the cares and pleasures which make up the great catalogue of human life, the whole of which active scene affords a proof that all things have their respective opportunities, or that one event springs from another in its time and its season. There is more depth of reasoning in this part of the discourse than seems to have

* Baker's Reflections upon Learning, p. 275.

been generally imagined : for the meaning of Solomon, in enumerating a series of necessary times or opportunities, is evidently this, that there is an absolute connexion between occurrences which are apparently of an opposite nature and tendency. This penetrating observer, in estimating moral causes, saw, that while man is engaged in forming and executing schemes of one kind, he is preparing, contrary to his designs, others of a different character and complexion. Out of the motives and projects of this short-sighted being, whether in his individual capacity or in the complicated mass of society, some secret power is perpetually drawing effects totally remote from the purposes of the agent, but all conducive to the universal benefit. The wise king here shows that there is a constant rotation of these desires and actions, which, influenced by the human will, produce an incessant variety of events, leading imperceptibly to the generation of others as remote as possible from the original source. Thus death is involved in the means used for the prolongation of life, mirth grows out of melancholy, health is allied to sickness, and the civility of war succeeds to the warmth of friendship. This circulation of motives and circumstances corresponds with what is seen to take place in the order of the natural world, where we perceive a round of seasons with fixed periods of return and duration, each bringing its productions and operations, calculated for the advantage of that which is to follow. In like manner day and night succeed each other, without interruption : the winds have their revolutions ; and the atmosphere, little as it may be known, is employed, among other things, in the distillation of the clouds, which, descending upon the earth, run by various channels into the sea, from the surface of which they ascend in the form of vapour ; so “ that whence the rivers come, thither they return again.” Thus, as the sagacious

inquirer into the secrets of nature remarks upon this progression of the elementary principles of life, "the thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done, is that which shall be done; and there is no new thing under the sun." The analogy is perfect, as far as the observations of man can extend to any knowledge of the material construction of the universe, and to what is still more difficult, the endless variety of human motives, which are the springs of all intelligence. In both cases the assertion of Solomon is a corollary, arising from the immutability of truth, and the operations of nature; "that which is crooked cannot be made straight, and that which is wanting cannot be numbered." This is an explanatory clue to that obscure passage which has strangely perplexed both commentators and their readers: "God hath made every thing beautiful in its time, also he hath set the world in their heart; so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end." What the Wise Man had just observed of the mechanical system of the world, he applies, by a very just illustration, to the condition of those for whom it was made. His principle is indeed the same in both cases, and experience proves that it is just; for as all natural things are included in their causes, so the ever-varying occurrences of human life arise from motives which evolve incidents that were totally unforeseen and undesigned by the agents from whom they emanate. Thus the springs by which the world is moved and carried on in a regular order, lie concealed in the hearts of men, even without their own conception of the matter; for while each is engaged in the travail of life, according to his particular destination and turn of mind, he thinks of nothing more than his own personal benefit. The distant effects of his resolutions and pursuits are so far from making any part of his calculation, that he little re-

guards the probable consequences of his determinations, and the revivable issue of a perseverance in that line of conduct which he has chosen. In every age and country mankind are actuated by the impressions of sense or the influence of passion, whereby motives are brought into action which cannot be recalled, nor their results prevented. Every member of the mass of intellect is governed by an inherent desire, the gratification of which unites him to the confluence of moral beings, by whom the purposes of Providence are executed, while each mind thinks only of its own. All the varieties of rational intelligence concur, therefore, in promoting the design of the Creator, and that even amidst their own irregularities and violent contentions. Like the aqueous particles exhaled by the solar heat, and dispersed in the air till a sufficient quantity being condensed falls to the earth, and there mingles with a mighty stream, the subjects of this moral process, though humble in themselves and apparently devoid of power, have so much influence upon the condition of the world, that without their union the whole would be in a state of stagnation. If this consideration were duly regarded, the lowest in the scale of society would be more circumspect over his mind and his actions, than is now commonly the case. Instead of considering himself as too insignificant to do good, he would find that the aggregate of public character depends upon the temper and pursuits of individuals; for though no man can reasonably indulge the idea, that his deportment and exertions alone will be sufficient to check the current of evil, or to alter the fashion of society, still it is in his power, and therefore must be his duty, to set such an example, in the "midst of a crooked and perverse nation, as may show that he is one of the lights of the world, holding forth the word of life." Phil. ii. 15, 16

JULY THE SIXTH.

THE WHOLE DUTY OF MAN.

Ecclesiastes, xii. 13, 14.—Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter. Fear God and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil.

THIS is the summary of the Wise Man's inquiries, and the result of his observations, after having taken an exact and minute survey of that moral world, in which the mind is ever busied in speculation, and continually disappointed in its labours. The objects of our intense application are vain, because we are variable and changing, while engaged in the ardent pursuit of them; so that those things, upon which the heart has been fixed with the keenness of desire and the eagerness of hope, instead of yielding the expected bliss, prove the source of vexation. Every step in the progress of life, as it alters our views, so it enlarges our real or imaginary wants; by which means things appear trifling or contemptible to the matured judgment, which were most important and attractive to the imagination. The emptiness of all earthly good, and the vexation which more or less distracts the active spirit of man, even while engaged in the pursuit, but more strongly when experience compares the enjoyment with the trouble of acquisition, must be charged to the account of human folly, and not to the objects of undue affection and inordinate desire.

The Almighty hath made all things beautiful in their time, and according to their necessary uses; but when man puts an improper value upon them, and seeks happiness in the enjoyment of them, then are

they the occasion of sin and productive of trouble. In this probationary state there can be no stability; for every successive day may justly be denominated a new life, which cannot be recalled when it is passed away. Our true interest, then, which comprehends every duty, is to consider all the varieties of time as subsidiary to the great end of our present existence, which is merely to prepare us for another. Solomon does not pass any harsh censure upon riches and magnificence, the ardour of youth, and the severe studies of elder life; on the contrary, he commends both the cheerful and inquisitive spirit: while of wealth, honestly acquired, he saith, "It is good and comely for one to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labour that he taketh under the sun all the days of his life which God giveth him; for it is his portion." But success does not always follow meritorious exertions; for neither is wisdom crowned with honour, nor honest industry attended with ease and affluence. So chequered and promiscuous is the distribution of temporal blessings, that we frequently see them possessed in the greatest abundance by those who make the worst application of them. It is not a new thing under the sun for the wicked to roll in the splendour of wealth and power, while the virtuous are struggling amidst incessant labour to gain a scanty maintenance; nor is the subject of Solomon's complaint uncommon even in this advanced stage of society, "Wisdom is better than strength; nevertheless the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard." Now if we believe that the universe is under the direction of an infinitely perfect Being, who, as the lover of order, must esteem knowledge and piety in his rational subjects, it will be impossible to account for these discordancies on any other ground than this, that we see at present only a part of his ways, and consequently that there must be another state beyond this,

when all the difficulties in his plan of government will be cleared up by an equitable allotment of rewards and punishments. Such is the tendency of the preacher's discourse in all its parts; and from every view which he has taken of human nature in the varieties of condition and the gradations of intellect, the difference of age, and the opposition of character, he found the certainty of this principle, that "God shall judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work." That vanity is stamped upon all the possessions of this world, without exception, would be a miserable consolation to the mind, when the infirmities so feelingly described in this chapter, "hasten man to his long home." In submitting to the necessity of nature, and comparing his situation with that of others, it would tend but little to remove the vexation of his spirit to be told that this is the common lot of all men; for "there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked; to him that sacrificeth and him that sacrificeth not." If things were so to remain with us after the most circumspect watchfulness over our conduct, and the constant endeavour to increase the stores of knowledge, the converse of the royal maxim would be the truth, "that wisdom excelleth folly as far as light excelleth darkness." Ch. ii. 13. So far from having any pre-eminence over the beasts that perish, man would be inferior to the meanest of the animal tribes, inasmuch as, with the faculty of combination, he could find no relief from the pain of reflection, nor derive comfort from his discoveries; because the consciousness of error must increase the weight of misery, and the uncertainty of life reduce the value of its enjoyments. But the researches of the wise monarch do not lead to any such dismal consideration; nor was it in his intention to excite a contempt of earthly good in the minds of his readers. Instead of this, he asserts the

great doctrine, that there is an established harmony in the moral and natural world, which man indeed does not perceive in this life, but which he will both see and confess in the next, when the whole system shall be justified by bringing every open deed and secret thing into judgment, "whether it be good or whether it be evil." The conclusion of the whole matter, or the scope of the entire argument, is therefore of the greatest magnitude: "Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole of man." When every thought, word, and action shall be so directed to that state which is the design of our present existence, then this world to us will neither be vain nor vexatious, because our hopes and desires are not placed upon any thing which it contains. By living continually as in the Divine presence, and regulating our wills according to the precepts which God hath imparted as the rule of reason, we shall assure to ourselves a certain remedy against the troubles of life and the apprehensions of death. All those perplexities which so greatly embarrass others in their progress through the world, will fail to agitate and distress the mind of him whose "affections are set upon things above, and not on things on the earth." If therefore we are thus dead to the perishable objects of sense, "and our life is hid with Christ in God," we know that "when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall we also appear with him in glory." With this blessed prospect and assurance to stay and comfort us, let it be our constant care to have our tempers modelled, and conduct regulated, by the rules of the Gospel; "putting on as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, as Christ also hath forgiven us." Col. iii. 1—13.

JULY THE SEVENTH.

CONFESSION OF THE CHURCH.

Solomon's Song, i. 5, 6.—*I am black but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem; as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon. Look not upon me because I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me: my mother's children were angry with me; they made me the keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept.*

THE Apostle of the Gentiles, in enforcing the duties belonging to the marriage-state, represents that institution as not only of divine origin, but as being typical of another union, infinitely pure and exalted, where the parties stand in a relation to each other, correspondent to that of the bride and her spouse; “This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the Church.” Ephes. v. 32. To the same purpose did the precursor of the Messiah describe himself as the herald of that holy alliance, when he said to his disciples, “He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and hearth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. This my joy, therefore, is fulfilled.” John, iii. 29. All this was agreeable to the language of ancient prophecy, in which we find the blessings of redemption set forth under the endearing imagery of connubial felicity. “For thy Maker is thine husband; the Lord of Hosts is his name, and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; the God of the whole earth shall he be called. For the Lord hath called thee as a woman forsaken, and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth when thou wast refused, saith thy God.” Is. liv. 5, 6. What these divine messengers announced, and the Saviour

himself applied and explained in his parable of the royal marriage, forms the entire subject of the mystic poem, called, by way of distinguished excellence, "The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's." It has been generally supposed that this beautiful piece is an epithalamium, in the dramatic form, founded on the nuptials of Solomon and the daughter of Pharaoh. That it might have been composed upon some occasion of this kind, is not improbable; but that the circumstances and descriptions, the characters and their speeches, were of a higher nature, is evident from the condition of the parties, which never could have agreed with the loves of Solomon and his Egyptian bride. The distribution of the whole into seven periods, or a week of days, is a happy discovery, and tends to cast much light upon every scene; for, contrary to those who would make the whole to be nothing more than a simple pastoral, this division, when carefully examined, will be found to mark so many periods in the Divine dispensations preparatory to the marriage-feast of the Lamb, when there shall be new heavens and a new earth, in which will dwell everlasting righteousness. Though the bridegroom is described as a royal personage, and the object of his best affections is raised by him to the participation of a throne, and is "attended with a train of queens and virgins without number;" yet at the beginning, and through the busiest part of the scene, she is poor and lowly in her own eyes, abject and despised even among her companions, and bitterly persecuted while seeking her beloved. Now nothing of all this could have suited the character of Pharaoh's daughter, any more than what is said of the bridegroom's occupation and pursuits, could with propriety be affirmed of Solomon, who was neither a hunter on the mountains, nor a shepherd in the plains.

When the bride first appears, she speaks with the

melting tenderness of a stranger admitted to the familiarity of persons whom she esteems, because they are the friends of her lord. In admiring their personal graces and accomplishments, she looks upon herself with diffidence, and in the simplicity of her heart intreats their indulgence to her want of beauty and the meanness of her origin. There is, however, a striking distinction in the matter of her complaint; for while she claims some favour on account of her sun-burnt complexion, and the rude treatment which she had received from her family, she takes to herself a considerable share of blame in having neglected the paternal inheritance which belonged to her: "My mother's children were angry with me; they made me the keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept." Any application of this singular apology and confession to the bride of Solomon, would be extravagant; but when we consider it as the pathetic language of the redeemed church, acknowledging her various idolatries, darkness, and negligence, we shall see reason to admire the comparison, and to profit by the example of penitence which it affords. In the figurative language of Scripture, the vineyard is a frequent image, adopted to represent that community which is distinguished by the manifestations of Divine grace in the revelation of the Word. The Almighty, in remonstrating with his ancient people for their infidelity and unfruitfulness, describes them as a plantation upon which uncommon pains had been bestowed, to no other effect than that of producing wild grapes; in consequence of which unthankful return, he threatens to "take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and to break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down." *Is. v. 5.* But though it was prophesied of this highly favoured state, that it should be "counted for a forest;" yet, by the pouring of the Spirit from on high, in the fullness of time

“judgment shall dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness remain in the fruitful field. And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever.” Is. xxxii. 15, 17. When the Lord of the vineyard sent his Son to fulfil the purpose of his love, in spreading the knowledge of salvation over the earth, those who had been constituted the keepers of the princely inheritance, rebelled against his Father’s authority, persecuted him with violence, and slew him out as dead. Here then begins to be revealed that beautiful spectacle which is described in the allegorical poem of Solomon, “The Beloved,” and anxious, but timid and modest maiden, makes her inquiries after her beloved, even this rejected Prince and Saviour, of whom she has read in the oracles of God, and whose wonders excite her admiration and desire. In this her progress she laments her unworthy appearance, and her coarse manners; still relying upon the promise of his love, she seeks him with the aid of holy men. “Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon; for why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions?” This was the exact character of the infant church, when he began to be gathered out of all lands, and, from the slavery of sin, was called to inherit the kingdom of God. Speaking of the corruptions which defiled the gentile world, the Apostle thus congratulates the Corinthian converts: “And such were some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.” 1 Cor. vi. 11.

JULY THE EIGHTH.

THE BEAUTY OF SPRING.

Solomon's Song, ii. 10—12. *My beloved spake and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away: for lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth, the time of the singing of birds is come, the voice of the turtle is heard in our land. The fig-tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vine doth bud: yea, the vine give a good smell. Come, my love, my fair one, and come away.*

In the figurative language of the Scriptures, spiritual things are set forth and the striking and beautiful promises of God, when she puts on the garment of righteousness, the promise of abundant life, and the promise of glory, when he came upon the scene of our redemption with the prospect of eternal life. "Said not ye, there are yet three months, and then cometh harvest? Behold, I say unto you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, for they are white already to harvest. And he that reapeth receiveth wages and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together." John, iv. 35, 36. In the allegorical poem of Solomon the bride anticipates this season of gladness, and in a full reliance upon the word of truth, she repeats to her companions the gracious invitation given by her lord to prepare for the wonderful change which is about to take place. The first consideration presented for the comfort of the spouse, and every renewed heart, is this, that the torpidity and darkness of winter, with all its piercing frosts and ruthless storms, are passed away; "the rain also is over and gone." All this is perfectly emblematic of the state of man, when the

revelation of mercy restores him again to life, by enlightening his mind, communicating to it the invigorating influence of Divine grace, and removing the condemnation of the law. The fall of Adam brought the moral world into a condition aptly compared to that of winter, when all the elements seem to be combined against man, plants die away to the very root, the earth is bound up in sterility, the air by its keenness benumbs the senses, and the clouds descend in overwhelming masses of snow, which render the ways impassable, or in torrents of rain, that swell the floods and threaten destruction to every living thing. The short-sighted sceptic, who saw for the first time this dismal scene, would be inclined to suppose that all vegetation was at an end; or that, if a recovery from this misery were possible, it must be after many years of labour uniformly favoured with element seasons. But when such an observer witnessed, in the course of a few weeks, the atmosphere becoming genial, the earth shooting forth its fragrant herbage, the trees giving signs of fruitfulness, and the animal tribes rejoicing in the renovated spring, his heart could not fail to be affected by the agreeable and unexpected alteration. Under these circumstances it would hardly be possible for him to enjoy the blessing, without feeling at the same time some veneration and gratitude towards that Power who "turneth the wilderness into a standing water, and dry ground into water-springs. And there he maketh the hungry to dwell, that they may prepare a city for habitation; and sow the fields and plant vineyards, which may yield fruits of increase." Ps. cvii. 35—37. Now this is a faithful picture of that blessed change which the Gospel has effected, and to the preparation for which the Spouse, or the Church, is here called by the heavenly Bridegroom. The Sun of Righteousness gave signs of his approach by the word of prophecy, and when he arose in the fullness

of time, "the flowers appeared on the earth;" of which he said, himself, that "Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these." Matt. vi. 29. The first-fruits of his manifestation, and the commencement of the Messiah's kingdom, were enriched with the graces of the Holy Spirit, and endowed with supernatural powers from their immediate communion with the Lord of Life. Mean and insufficient as they were of themselves, these early plants were mighty through grace, and to them was imparted that vital principle which enabled them to multiply abundantly, and to spread the truth wherever they went; thus confirming what was foretold concerning the Redeemer, "A seed shall serve him; it shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation." Ps. xxii. 30.

When these flowers diffused their odour, nature revived, and it was a proof that the "time of the singing of birds was come;" that the period indicated before the flood, beheld afar off by the patriarchs, shadowed in the services of the tabernacle, and gloriously described by numerous prophets; that this long-expected season was now come, when, to speak in the language of one who hailed its opening, "the Day-spring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." Luke. i. 78, 79. This was, indeed, "the time of the singing of birds;" for it was the commencement of a glorious era, that shall never terminate till the consummation of the union, described in this sacred song, when "the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion, with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." Is. xxxv. 10. It is another sign of this delightful spring, that "the voice of the turtle is heard in our land," which was the case when the Holy Spirit, as a dove, de-

ascended upon the Redeemer at his baptism, and the word of peace was declared by God the Father, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Matt. iii. 17. The voice of this Turtle was heard by the ancient church, in the "clefts of the rock, and in secret places;" to which communications the Apostle alludes, when he says, "God, at sundry times and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets." Heb. i. 1. But the joyful sound was more distinct and full when it came from Him who received the Spirit beyond measure, and who said to his chosen ones, appointed to establish his kingdom, "The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name; he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." John, xiv. 26.

The concluding particulars, which mark the affinity of the natural spring and that of the Gospel, are the fertility of the fig-tree and the fragrance of the vine. By the former is to be understood that repentance and the fruits of it, which follow the preaching of the word; and this explication was given by the Bridegroom himself in his parable, which, though addressed primarily to the Jewish nation, equally concerns every other community and individual to whom the offer of salvation comes. "A certain man," says our Lord, "had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard, and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. And he said to the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none: cut it down; why doth it cumberth it the ground?" Luke, xiii. 6, 7. But though the people represented by this barren tree, so basely repaid the labour expended upon them, and did at last suffer the punishment here denounced upon them for their unbelief; there were others who brought forth much fruit; and being engrafted into

the true vine, "gave a good smell," in the sincerity of their faith and the purity of their conversation. This was the spring of Christianity, which is also realized in the experience of every true disciple who hearkens to the voice of the Bridegroom, arises at the awakening call of conversion, accepts with thankfulness the offer of grace, and studies with the utmost diligence to "be unto God a sweet savour of Christ," 2 Cor. ii. 15.

JULY THE NINTH.

THE SPIRITUAL LETHARGY.

Solomon's Song, v. 2.—*I sleep, but my heart waketh.*

HOWEVER beautiful and captivating the figurative portions of Scripture are to the mind that truly enters into the spirit of them, there is no small difficulty in the application of particular descriptions, arising from the cautious diffidence which the chastened judgment of the believer will always feel, when engaged in contemplating the emblematic representations, or symbolical language, of the Holy Oracles. While some regard all the contents of the inspired pages with the same critical apathy or speculative curiosity, which they exercise in the study of human writings, there are others who refine the plainest relations into allegories, and confound the literal sense by fanciful interpretations, of no practical utility. Thus, between the one and the other, some of the most important and edifying parts of the Sacred Volume have been so irreverently or imprudently treated, as to set many serious persons against the reading of the mystical Scriptures, thinking that they are too intricate to be understood, or too ob-

secure to be instructive. By this means, what was designed for the universal benefit of the church, and the edification of the believer in every age, fails to yield that counsel and comfort which, when duly considered, it is most powerfully calculated to impart. It was not for this, surely, that the wisdom of God gave information to man, and condescended to make him acquainted with the mysteries of redemption, in various forms and under many sensible representations. As these songs are either of divine or human composition; if they are yet to retain that place in the Sacred Canon, which has been allotted them by the unanimous consent of the ancient church, then is it certain that they are holy in their signification, and must consequently be profitable for doctrine and instruction in righteousness, to the end of time. In all that concerns the royal Bridegroom and his humble but exalted spouse, we have a lively interest; for, as the objects of grace, and the heirs of a kingdom secured for us by this ineffable union, whatever is said of the bride is addressed by the Spirit to all who, like her, feel that they are utterly miserable without the enjoyment of the Redeemer's love.

When we dismiss all other considerations from our affections, and thirst for that happiness which flows only from the fountain of living water, opened by the incarnation and sufferings of the Mediator—made known by revelation, and imparted by the Spirit, then shall we enter into the full meaning of this divine epithalamium, and be enabled to make the language of the bride our own; when she is lamenting in soliloquy her desolate condition, or speaking the praises of her Lord to the surrounding maidens; when she is tremulously answering his call with holy rapture, or, fearless of danger and regardless of opposition, she seeks his presence with anxious desire. There is one remarkable scene in the piece, from

which we may derive both valuable instruction and awful warning. It may in fact be considered as forming the busiest part of the whole performance, and that where the real design of the representation begins to unfold itself most conspicuously in the characters of the two objects herein delineated. The bride having compared herself to a garden, and the object of her best affections to a fountain of living water, breathes forth a fervent prayer, that all her virtues may be rendered acceptable to him: "Awake, O north wind, and come thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out, then let my beloved come into his garden and eat his pleasant fruits." After such an affectionate expression of her love, and such a longing desire for his coming, in whom all her soul delighted, it might have been expected that she would have eagerly run to receive him on hearing his voice, saying, "I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse: I have gathered my myrrh with my spice: I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey: I have drunk my wine with my milk; eat, O friends; drink, yea drink abundantly, O beloved." Here the intimacy is repaid with the fullness of kindness, an exuberance of joy, and the preparation of a splendid banquet, suited to the nuptials of a monarch; but how is the call accepted, where are the wedding guests, the minstrels with the sound of mirth, and the bride with her joyful train? Instead of being ready at the coming of the royal suitor, and hastening in glad procession to celebrate the marriage of the great king, the stillness of death is spread through the whole pavilion, and the spouse herself, on hearing his voice, faintly murmurs, "I sleep, but my heart waketh." In this state did the Bridegroom find the church when he came, by virtue of the original promise, and agreeable to the repeated declarations given through the medium of prophecy; yet his overtures were slighted, his calls,

both of mercy and judgment, were alike unheeded; and when he sent out his servants to call them that were bidden to the marriage, they made light of it, and went their ways, "one to his farm, and another to his merchandize;" as the betrothed maiden in the Song excused her sloth and indifference, "I have put off my vest, how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet, how shall I defile them?" Such treatment did the Messiah experience when he came unto his own, who "despised and rejected him as a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; hiding as it were their faces from him, and esteeming him not." *Is. linc. 3.* The church was indeed awakened at his voice, but she went not forth to meet him; in consequence of which ingratitude and negligence the Bridegroom departed, and a season of scorch, inquiry, and persecution followed. His first advent was clouded with trouble, being opposed by rebuke and blasphemy where he had every reason to look for a joyful welcome, and to be obeyed with cheerfulness. Some faithful servants, it is true, attended to his invitation, and followed his foot-steps in the midst of reproach and violence, poverty and death; but they were few in number, simple in condition, and weak in ability, yet of such as these did he form his establishment upon earth, which will continue to increase and multiply till his second coming, when the espousals shall be celebrated with solemn pomp and glorious majesty in heaven. To that feast are we called by the Spirit, who commands us to make preparations for it by the cultivation of our tempers and the practice of every duty, so that when the Bridegroom cometh we may be found with our lamps trimmed, ready to go with him to the marriage; while the careless and the slothful are shut out for ever. "Watch, therefore; for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of Man cometh." *Matt. xxv. 13.*

JULY THE TENTH.

THE DIVINE INTERCOURSE.

Solomon's Song, vii. 11, 12.—*Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field; let us lodge in the villages. Let us get up early to the vineyards, let us see if the vines flourish; whether the tender grape appear, and the pomegranates bud forth; there will I give thee my loves.*

It has been the strange fate of the Canticles to be admired by the best judges of poetical elegance, as a series of exquisite eclogues upon the tenderest of all subjects; and yet to be treated with a degree of cold indifference by those who, from their principles and piety, ought to have prized these poems on account of that spiritual sense which gives them all their life and interest. The false delicacy of some will not allow any other meaning to these pastorals than what is obviously contained in the letter of the dialogue, and the simple construction of the story. But if the mystical character be taken away, it is obvious that, whatever may be the literary excellence of the piece, it can have no legitimate claim to its present station. The contents of the Holy Volume are of a far higher kind than the productions of mere genius, and were imparted for a more important purpose than to gratify the mind by curious information, or to charm it by the harmony of numbers and the beauty of description. Though the subject is a royal marriage, it is such an one as never took place in the person of Solomon, or any other earthly king; for the circumstances which are related of the parties cannot, with reasonable probability, be supposed of any moving in that sphere of elevated life. These extraordinary occurrences, involving distress and poverty, watching and weariness, labour and

persecution, all terminating in a blessed union and glorious exaltation, sufficiently indicate the allegorical character of the entire poem, the moral of which is divine, though the language is accommodated to the perceptions and feelings of human nature. We have caught a glimpse of the real Bridegroom in the shade which overspreads the piece; but he was no sooner divinely seen, and his voice heard, than he as suddenly disappeared, leaving the slumbering fair-one to mourn her indiscretion, and to seek the object of her expectation amidst the cares and resistance of the world. This wonderful Personage was, however, found by the meek and quiet spirits, who awoke at the call of grace, and became the first-fruits of the Redeemer's humiliation; the members of that community, which he hath "sanctified and cleansed with the washing of water by the Word; that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish," Ephes. v. 26, 27. The visible church is in the Scripture generally compared to a garden or vineyard; and this idea corresponds with the description of that sacred inclosure, over which the first man was established, both as a ruler and cultivator; and where he might have attained happiness in the eternal progression of improvement, if he had not forfeited the blessing by an offence, which amounted to rebellion and sacrilege. As the terrestrial paradise was distinguished by the tree of life, which constituted its essential glory; so Christ, as the true vine, imparts vitality to the church; and it is only by communion with him that we have either the will or the power to bring forth the fruits of righteousness. In this Divine plantation the quickening energy of the Spirit is continually reviving and nourishing the heirs of immortality; "as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown therein to spring

forth." Is. lxi. 11. The imagery of the mystic song is of the same kind, and conveys the same meaning, being designed to represent the blessings of the Gospel and the extent of the church, under the immediate influence of the Messiah, as her priest, lawgiver, and king.. When he appears in his mediatorial character, the spouse intreats him to accompany her "into the field, and to lodge in the villages;" by which is to be understood the manifestation of his name and the diffusion of the glad tidings of salvation among all nations; for the field, in this place, denotes the world at large, while the villages are expressive emblems of the particular churches planted in different countries. These branches of the Christian family, dispersed over many regions, and diversified by various peculiarities, which affect not the radical principles of faith, are the objects of His care and love, who is said to "walk in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks." Rev. ii. 1. Now this vision of the apostolical prophet was an illustration of the tender scene exhibited in the allegorical poem; for as the Almighty Saviour visits the churches to examine their condition, to administer counsel, and give them suitable warnings and promises; so the bridegroom, in the song, is desired to get up early to see if the vine flourishes; "whether the tender grape appear, and the pomegranates bud forth."

Here we are taught the same great and momentous truth which runs throughout the whole of our Lord's public doctrine, and the directions given by his Apostles for the conduct of the Christian life, "that faith without works is dead;" while at the same time we learn that the vivifying Spirit, whereby our services are rendered acceptable to God and profitable to his church, comes from our union with Him who is called the second Adam, because he hath restored that which was lost by the first. "I am the vine, ye

are the branches," saith the Saviour; "he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing." John, xv. 5. Now it follows, as a necessary consequence, that if the root be one, and if there can be no life or fruitfulness but what is derived from thence, we must, as the disciples of Christ, be united with each other. According to many unavoidable circumstances, indeed, both churches, as well as individual believers, may be characterized by various distinctions; but, instead of weakening the bond of affection, these shades of difference should invigorate the whole body to the increase of that "faith which worketh by love." Gal. v. 6. But this consideration, though it is an incitement to charity and zeal, so far from giving encouragement to divisions, and the formation of new professions and societies, under the pretence of a purer worship and greater edification, directly condemns all such separations as a self-willed departure from that communion of which Christ is the head; and "from whom the whole body, fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body, unto the edifying of itself in love." Ephes. iv. 16. It is in this orderly inclosure, where each humble and submissive spirit is content to follow rather than lead, that the Lord of the vineyard delights to dwell, marking the improvement of every branch, and imparting grace to all, according to their stations and need, agreeable to his promise: "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring. And they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the watercourses." Is. xlv. 3, 4.

JULY THE ELEVENTH.

THE WORD OF PROPHECY.

Isaiah, ii. 1, 2.—*The WORD that Isaiah, the son of Amoz, saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. And it shall come to pass, in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains; and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.*

WHEN we read that the "Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us," our minds are immediately impressed with the idea of a Divine Person descending from on high, and taking upon him the tabernacle of a visible form, for some great and gracious purpose, becoming the wisdom of God, and necessary to the happiness of man. It is impossible to put any other construction upon the declaration, without distorting the plainest language into an unintelligible enigma, and involving the simple narrative of facts in the darkness of allegory and fable, the moral of which may be matter of agreeable speculation, but can never acquire the force of an immutable rule, either with respect to faith or manners. But what the evangelical historian affirms to have taken place, was made known several ages before to the prophet, who described this miraculous incarnation in the plainest terms, and who had himself a view of the wonderful Personage, concerning whose life and sufferings, death and resurrection, he was enabled to reveal the most exact predictions, attended with particulars so precise and circumstantial, that the discovery could have proceeded from no other source than the eternal Spirit, before whom all that is future is as the past. Now that a Word should be seen, certainly does sound extraordinary, and to some may appear as

contradictory to common sense; but it is not more strange than that the same Word should become embodied, and move about from place to place. Yet the very object which the prophet beheld in a vision, an Apostle informs the church, was made familiar to himself and other chosen witnesses; "that which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the Word of Life." 1 John, i. 1. This Word was therefore substantial; and so the term must always be understood whenever it occurs in the Old Testament, whether by itself, or connected with the ineffable name of the self-existent Power, in whom we live, move, and have our being. As the oral expression, declaratory of man's will, cannot be separated from the idea of his person; so the Logos, or Word of God, necessarily conveys the persuasion, that whatever that may be which is distinguished by this appellative, it must be essentially divine. It should always be borne in mind, that spiritual things are made known to us under forms and by modes of speech adapted to our conceptions; but which, after all, can express no more than very faint shadows of what they represent. This is more especially the case with respect to the Divine nature and attributes, which are exhibited in language forcible and sublime, yet so awfully figurative and tremendously obscure as to humble the wise in the midst of their most intense inquiries, by confounding, with new and inexplicable difficulties, all speculations which go beyond the revealed testimony. Scripture, then, must be interpreted by itself, in all points that relate to the essence of God, and his operations in the visible and invisible world. All that is imparted in the Holy Oracles is an act of condescension to the sons of men, the most sagacious of whom never could have discovered any part of the Divine intentions from

the things which are created, even though all nature may be justly considered as yielding abundant evidences of infinite power and intelligence. Still nothing beyond the mechanical construction of the universe, could be ascertained by human observation; for the knowledge of events hidden in the womb of futurity, and dependent upon contingencies, over which man has no controul, must transcend the reach of the highest capacity, no intellect being able to penetrate, unaided, into the developement of circumstances which are as yet involved in the dark abyss of secret causes. The motions of the planets may be calculated, and the conjunctions of those bodies determined with precision; while patient computation and accurate measurement will enable the scientific observer to delineate the orbits and predict the returns of comets, whose rare occurrence and portentous appearance never fail to astonish the ignorant and alarm the superstitious. But the rise of new empires never could have been foreseen, nor the limits of their duration defined, by any other wisdom than that which cometh directly from above; by the immediate inspiration of Him "who made the earth and created man upon it; whose hands stretched out the heavens, and who commandeth all their host." Is. xlv. 12. This knowledge was imparted to Isaiah in a more copious degree than to any other of the prophets; and that mind must be sunk into a state of total insensibility, or hardened by inveterate prejudice, which is unaffected by the oracles contained in these divine compositions.

The Word, under whose guidance the prophet wrote, directs his revelations to Judah and its capital, because this nation and that city are primarily concerned in all the events foretold, and in a more particular manner are they interested in that universal blessing which forms the prevailing subject of the whole book; "for out of Zion shall go forth the

law, and the Word of Jehovah from Jerusalem." But at what time, may it be asked, did this kingdom send out a legislative system to the rest of mankind; and in what sense could it be ever said that the authority of the Lawgiver, here called the Word of Jehovah, was acknowledged beyond the precincts of Jacob's peculiar inheritance? Such, however, must be the meaning of the prophecy, for it is expressly asserted that "all nations shall flow unto the mountain of the Lord's house; and the peoples (by whom the Gentiles are always to be understood) shall say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths." So far from any thing of this kind having taken place, Judah is scattered, and its city is the habitation of strangers; the site of the temple cannot be traced, and the whole Levitical institution has long since given way to forms and ceremonies which have little resemblance to the law of Moses. Has the prophecy then failed, or is it yet to come? The answer can only be obtained by inquiring whether any Divine rule of universal import has proceeded from Zion, and been received by the Gentiles; who, in submitting to that system of righteousness, have become the subjects of Jehovah, the Word. Without looking, then, for a future accomplishment of the prophecy, let the believer and the unbeliever, the Jew and the Gentile, attentively consider what followed this extraordinary commission, given to a few poor, unlettered, and persecuted men, by Him whom Isaiah saw in this vision, and beheld again in the glory of the temple. "Then opened Jesus their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures, and said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name, among

all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things." Luke, xxiv. 45—48.

JULY THE TWELFTH.

THE MIRACULOUS CONCEPTION.

Isaiah, vii. 14.—*The Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a Virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.*

THIS remarkable prophecy has been the subject of much laboured criticism; and some writers, in the plenitude of their zeal, have endeavoured to explain that by conjecture which an evangelist has applied to the miraculous conception announced in the angelical message; "Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a Virgin shall be with child, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted, is, God with us." Matt. i. 22, 23. As if the sacred historian had anticipated the objections of unbelievers, and the accommodating schemes of commentators, he declares with great precision and solemnity, that the prediction and the event were purposely connected in the Divine intention, or that the matter revealed by special communication from heaven to the spouse of the blessed Virgin, was the designed object of the promise. Now as this authority was not necessary to the credit of the narrative, no grave writer would have adduced it with such a strong asseveration, if the passage was to be considered only as an illustrative figure of the marvellous incident which he was relating. But the Apostle affirms, in language not to be misunderstood, that the subject of the celestial embassy was the same with that of the prophetic declaration, and

therefore the prediction must be limited to one event, which being a sign from heaven, was unequalled in the course of nature. Unless, therefore, a preposterous concession is made to heretical sophistry, by dismembering this venerable Gospel of its two first chapters, the prophecy, as far as the quotation extends, must be confined exclusively to the circumstance recorded in this history. The great source from whence all the mistakes and perplexities have arisen in the discussion of this passage, has been the limitation of the sign in the way of consolation to Ahaz and his attendant princes. But the fact is, that the inspired messenger reproved the king of Judah, and the men of that generation, for their infidelity; and he denounced against that kingdom severe judgments, almost amounting to an entire dereliction. Ahaz, distressed as he was by a formidable confederacy, paid no attention to the message of the prophet; and he even refused to accept the offer that was made him in the name of the Lord. Notwithstanding this obduracy and impiety, Isaiah proclaimed a sign, not for the encouragement of the reigning monarch, who still persisted in his idolatry, but to the house of David, thereby giving an assurance that the original covenant made with the head of this royal lineage should be completely established. At this time there were many things which might have led even the most pious mind to fear, and the strongest to despond; for the situation of Judah was such as to give no hopes of deliverance, since, besides the unnatural alliance of Israel and Syria against it, the whole state was sunk in corruption. Yet the Almighty was mindful of his word; and therefore, in this dark and perilous time, he sent his servant to declare that this coalition should be destroyed, because it had for its object the annihilation of the house of David. By making a breach in the succession, the conspirators hoped to effect

the ruin of that which they held in dread and abhorrence. The revelation imparted by Isaiah was therefore general, and intended to become matter of record, to show that neither the present combination, nor any future efforts, should succeed in overturning that decree by which the blessing of a glorious reign and perpetuity was secured to the family of David. Ahaz had no personal concern in this sign and promise; nor was the wonderful child here described to arise in his days, though the monarch did indeed receive an assurance that shortly his land should be delivered from its invaders. Much has been said upon the characteristic distinction given so emphatically by the prophet to the mother of the infant destined to appear as a sign from heaven; for since the application of the prediction to the Son of Mary, the Jews, and other unbelievers, have endeavoured to make it appear that the word *Virgin* means no more, in this place, than a young woman. If this were admitted, the prophet's declaration would be deprived altogether of its predictive dignity, and cease at once to be any sign of the Divine interposition. The Jewish authors of the Greek version were better acquainted with their own language, or rather they had no inducements to commit any violence upon the customary phraseology, when they rendered the word as we do, by one that signifies a female in the most perfect state of purity. Yet by a very desperate blunder, which is common to malice, the enemies of our faith have pressed into their service Agur's enigmatical mystery, which, as it stands in our translation, might seem to be for them; but according to the original it ought to be read thus, "the way of the Mighty One in the Virgin." Prov. xxx. 19. Another objection raised against the application of this prophecy to the infant of Bethlehem, is taken from the appellation borne by the predicted child, which verbally differs from that announced by the angel to

the virgin mother and her husband. But though our Lord was not called Emmanuel literally, he was distinguished by that transcendent name, of which the prophetic prenomination was no more than a periphrastic exposition. As the Word was made flesh, or tabernacled with us, he had a name expressive of his essential Divinity, and of the object of his incarnation, which was to save his people from their sins. That term, which is significant of self-existence, became incorporated with another, denoting the union of Him who bore it with man's nature for the great purpose of universal salvation. The prophet here describes both the person and his name, his descent and his offices, in language which will be found to correspond *only* with the history of Him who "was both the Lord of David and his son;" of whom that monarch wrote, and in whom he believed as his God and Saviour; but who descended from him according to the flesh, that this and all the other predictions might be fulfilled.

This doctrine of the miraculous conception has been a stumbling-block to many; yet unless we give up the whole of Christianity, and the body of prophetic evidence by which it is supported, nothing can be more certain than that the ancient church trusted for redemption only to a Mediator, who should unite the human to the Divine nature, in a manner incomprehensible to our reason and perceptions. It is deserving of serious attention, that the promised Redeemer speaks uniformly of his mother in the prophetic Scriptures, but never of any immediate paternal origin. Among other places to this purpose, the following is remarkable, and may justly be considered as a full explication of the predicted sign which we have been considering: "Listen, O isles, unto me; and hearken, ye people from far: Jehovah hath called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention

of my name. And he hath made my mouth like a sharp sword ; in the shadow of his hand hath he hid me, and made me a polished shaft ; in his quiver hath he hid me, and said unto me, Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified." Is. xlix. 1—3.

JULY THE THIRTEENTH.

THE CHILD OF WONDER.

Isaiah, ix. 6, 7.—*Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given ; and the government shall be upon his shoulder ; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice, from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will do this.*

THE prophecy contained in this and the preceding chapter, appears to have been delivered when the Assyrians threatened the utter ruin of Judah in the days of Hezekiah, after having desolated Israel ; and thus, by the merciful order of providential wisdom, breaking in pieces the confederacy formed against the house of David. From the consideration and improvement of temporal judgments, the Divine Word, speaking by the mouth of the prophet, uses, as usual, to expatiate on the certainty of the promise to be conveyed to all nations through the medium of that family. The predicted sign in the former prophecy gave an assurance to this house, that its security should remain unshaken till the secret purposes of God were fulfilled by the birth of a child out of

the ordinary course of nature. In the present amplified description, this extraordinary infant is brought forwards under all the glorious circumstances of his matured character, as the just and eternal King. The two predictions, therefore, have clearly the same object; for both relate to a superhuman incarnation in the family of David, and both declare that the person so miraculously to be born is nothing less than the Mighty God. Now if there had been any doubt left respecting the interpretation of the sign mentioned in the first prophecy, it will be completely removed by the elaborate view which is here given of this illustrious Potentate; from his birth to the full establishment of his throne. On the former occasion it is affirmed that the food of this child shall be butter and honey, by which we are to understand that his advent will be in a time of peace and plenty; and this was remarkably the case when the true Immanuel came to reconcile heaven and earth, by the sacrifice of himself, and thus to impart the blessing of eternal life to mankind. This diet, however, for which the Saviour is said to be distinguished, must be understood of his government and doctrine, the rules which he was to lay down conformably to his own example of holy living, and the great truths to be revealed by him for the instruction and comfort of believers. In the parabolical style, spiritual things are uniformly figured by sensible representations, of which those drawn from the scenes of nature are the most common; particularly when the matter typified indicates mental improvement, and a beneficial change of moral condition. The opening of the Messiah's kingdom is therefore compared, in this prophecy, to the glad season of the year when the industry and patience of the husbandman are rewarded with an abundant prospect and a joyful ingathering of the fruits of his labours. The harvest here promised is rendered more grateful by the circumstances which

precede it, for "the Lord hideth his face from the house of Jacob;" so that the "land is covered with trouble, and darkness, and dimness of anguish." This is a strong, but exact, sketch of the Jewish nation, when the Sun of Righteousness arose to illuminate the earth; and though that people were so mercifully preserved in the wreck of Jacob's family, as even to have increased when the other branches were scattered and separated from their native land, still the remnant had little cause for exultation, being not only oppressed by a foreign yoke, but more sadly degraded by the corruption of their principles and manners. There was a general famine of the word, and the ordinances of God were set aside or perverted, to make room for the foolish inventions of men. In all this the state of Judea, at the appearance of Christ, corresponded minutely with the gloomy picture drawn by the pencil of the prophet. At such a time, when human wisdom would have entertained but faint hopes of any Divine interference, the arm of Omnipotence was becoming visible; and amidst this obscurity, arising from prejudice and superstition; ignorance and infidelity, the glory of the Lord arose and diffused its cheering influence, "by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, in Galilee of the nations." Justly, then, did the evangelical historian apply this prediction to the commencement of the Redeemer's mission, when, after triumphing over the assaults of the tempter, "he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea-coast, in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthali." Matt. iv. 13. But striking as the fact is, of his beginning to preach the kingdom of heaven in the region foretold, yet what follows in the prediction must not be overlooked, because, when it is connected with this part of the Gospel, we shall find that the whole prophetic description had then its fulfillment. It cannot escape observation, that the joy

of the husbandman is contrasted with another scene of a very different kind, and that the songs of the reapers are blended with the acclaim of victory and the shouts of "a grateful people freed from the yoke of bondage, and the rod of the oppressor." Now it is obvious that the joyful harvest is one of the blessings resulting from this great deliverance, and that the conflict, by which the whole is effected, is sustained by one person against adversaries both numerous and powerful; for "the feet of the armed warrior, and the garment rolled in blood, shall be for a burning, even fuel for the fire." This portrait, allowing as much as possible to the warmth and richness of Eastern poetry, goes far beyond all that can be conceived of any mortal champion; and the end of this conquest can be understood in no other sense than as extending to the utter destruction of all evil. Who, then, is this invincible Personage, at once so gracious and so terrible, the object of grateful adoration and of vengeful animosity, the hope of the afflicted and the dread of the destroyer? To this inquiry the prophet answers in behalf of the church, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Father of the everlasting age, the Prince of Peace." These characteristics are peculiar to the Divinity engaged in the exercise of love towards man, and as such they are all included in the comprehensive term of Immanuel, or "God with us;" and still more emphatically in that of Jesus, which is "the Lord our Saviour." From this sublime view of the Redeemer's person, the prophet directs our attention to the nature and extent of his sovereignty; "Of the increase of his government and peace, there shall be no end; upon the throne of David and upon his kingdom to fix it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice, hence-

forth and for ever. The zeal of Jehovah of hosts will perform this." Attributes like these never could be affirmed of any monarch, however excellent his character; nor of any empire, whatever might be its extent and durability. But all misapprehension upon this momentous subject is removed at once, by the gracious declaration, that He who sways this sceptre is no other than that powerful Being who commands the armies of heaven, and renews the souls of men; who voluntarily shrouded his Divine Majesty in our humanity, that "he might be made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: that according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord." 1 Cor. i. 30.

JULY THE FOURTEENTH.

THE HOLY ONE OF ISRAEL.

Isaiah, xii. 6.—*Cry out and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion; for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee.*

WE have heard the promise that the Mighty One should become as it were bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh, by a Divine operation in the womb of the Virgin; and we have also observed, through the same prophetic medium, the unfolding of his glory as the righteous and eternal King, redeeming his people by conquest, and ruling over them in peace. Now, at no period of the Jewish monarchy can any scene be found that corresponds with this description; for the two illustrious reigns of Hezekiah and Josiah, glorious as they were, failed to render the throne permanent, both princes being succeeded by others of a different character, who contaminated the nation by their example, and hastened the Divine judgment

by their impiety. From the time of the restoration of the people by the decree of Cyrus, to the loss of their independence when Judea became a Roman province, the house of David was without power, till it sunk into a state of obscurity and poverty. So far, then, was the prediction of its stability and magnificence from being realized in the appearance of a temporal sovereign, that each revolving year lessened the confidence of hope, and every political change removed the probability of a revival. But all this, instead of weakening the credit of the prophet, gives lustre to his character, and stamps the indelible majesty of truth upon his revelations. He foretold the dispersion of Israel and the desolation of Judah, in express terms, and to the fullest extent; yet notwithstanding the calamities denounced by him against both kingdoms, he turns from the picture of woe to repeat the promise, that a deliverer and king shall arise in the family of David, even when reduced to its lowest state, and decayed as it were to the very root. The description of this extraordinary Ruler, who makes his appearance under every disadvantage, and acquires the sovereignty without human strength or wisdom, plainly points to a character and condition totally different from the pomp of earthly dignity and the parade of warlike achievements. This righteous branch, from the withered trunk of Jesse, is "anointed with the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, of counsel and strength, of knowledge and holy fear;" so that "he judges not according to the sight of his eyes, nor reproves according to the hearing of his ears." If in all this we perceive the highest measure of judicial excellence, what follows shows, that the Ruler, who so administers righteousness "to the poor and the meek," does it not by setting up a formidable kingdom in the splendour and terror of an external power, but by the invincible force of moral truth, working conviction in the hearts of men, and making them willing subjects of his

dominion. Such is the influence of his doctrine, that it overturns the superstitious systems of mankind, however firmly established, and those institutions which were of earthly origin ; while the preaching of the Word, by those who receive their commission from his lips, succeeds in mortally wounding the evil one. The consequence of this glorious manifestation is figured as the restoration of that paradisaical state, when universal harmony prevailed among the various tribes of animal beings. "The wolf shall take up his abode with the lamb ; and the leopard shall lie down with the kid ; and the calf, and the young lion, and the fatling, shall come together : and a little child shall lead them. And the heifer and the she-bear shall feed together ; together shall their young ones lie down ; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the suckling shall play upon the hole of the asp ; and upon the den of the basilisk shall the new-weaned child lay his hand. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountains ; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of Jehovah, as the waters that cover the depths of the sea."

This exquisite picture of the renovated golden age, infinitely transcends all that has been painted by the luxuriant fancy of the poets ; and while it affords a clear proof that the predicted kingdom is of a spiritual nature, in which the moral principles of men will undergo an essential change, it points indirectly at the cause of this wonderful alteration, in the victory obtained over the serpent by the miraculous Child, who "shuts the deceiver up in his den, and sets his seal upon him." Rev. xx. 3. But the prophet himself immediately explains the figurative scene which he had just exhibited, by representing the supernatural scion from the root of Jesse, as rising to the height of universal observation ; so that, like the pole elevated by the Hebrew legislator for the

recovery of the wounded Israelites, this Saviour becomes an ensign to the peoples, or the gentile nations, who unite in repairing to this standard; after which the outcasts of Israel are gathered, and the dispersed of Judah are collected from the four extremities of the earth. This united and redeemed church now appears, professing the same faith, and singing the high praises of Jehovah, who hath called the various members of the great community together by his grace, and renewed them by his spirit; so that "with joy they draw water out of the wells of salvation." As there is but one Redeemer, so these assembled multitudes, made up of all the varieties of mankind, are here beautifully described in the act of satisfying their thirsty souls from the same fountain, and in the fullness of their joy, "praising Jehovah; calling upon his name, and declaring his marvellous doings to each other." By an abrupt, but most expressive transition, the prophet concludes the hymn of gratulation by indicating the Divine Person, from whom all these blessings flow; and who becomes the attractive object of faith and love to the inhabitants of the whole earth; "Cry out and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion; for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee." This was an appellative, by which the Jewish church always acknowledged the self-existent Being, who was her God and King; the same that called Abraham, and changed the name of Jacob; that commissioned Moses out of the flaming bush, and of whom David said, "I will praise thee with the psaltery, even thy truth, O my God: unto thee will I sing with the harp, O thou Holy One of Israel." Ps. lxxi. 22. This prophetic hymn of Isaiah made a part of the temple service at the feast of tabernacles, when the people went with great exultation to fetch water from the fountain of Siloah, springing at the foot of mount Zion; and this being brought up with great ceremony, was poured, with a

mixture of wine, upon the sacrifices, while the congregation joined in singing, "With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation." It was on this last great day of the feast that the Holy One appeared in the midst of Zion, and in direct fulfillment of the prediction, "He stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." John, vii. 37, 38.

JULY THE FIFTEENTH.

THE SURE FOUNDATION.

Isaiah, xxviii. 16.—*Behold, I lay in Zion, for a foundation, a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste.*

THIS chapter contains a mixture of heavy denunciations and affecting remonstrances, threatenings of temporal punishments and the promise of spiritual blessings. The ruin of Israel by Shalmanezzer is compared to the terrible effects of a tempest of hail, a destroying storm, and an overwhelming flood. Having thus forcibly depicted the dereliction of that nation, the prophet turns to the two other branches of Jacob's family, Judah and Benjamin, who were to continue as an independent state some time after the captivity of their brethren. This part of the prophecy commences with a favourable view of the condition of these tribes under Hezekiah; but the language quickly changes into complaints of their immorality and reproofs of their impiety. Alike unmindful of judgment and mercy, the people, spared by the Divine goodness, are described as plunged

into the grossest depravity of manners; rendered more odious by the general perversion of religious principles. Among other marks of their profane character, they are represented as scoffing at the messengers of God in the most ribaldrous language, and turning their warnings and monitions into ridicule. Too proud to endure the plain lessons of truth, and too wise in their own estimation to be taught the elements of knowledge, they despised the preaching of the Word, because it required humility of heart, and the utter renunciation of self-righteousness. These deceivers indulged the conceit that they were entitled to present security and future happiness, on account of their high privileges; and they laid claim to the Divine favour as a reward due to their services. Notwithstanding the fearful examples which they had seen in the calamities of their brethren, this inconsiderate people wrapped themselves up in vain confidence, that no harm could befall them; and in the true spirit of infidelity they said, by their actions, "We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us; for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves." Such is the picture of the Jewish nation, drawn by the prophet; and though doubtless it was a faithful sketch of the age in which he lived, it was completely realized in that day when the Holy One came personally upon earth, preaching repentance unto Israel and the forgiveness of sins. That the prediction had then its full accomplishment, is clear from all the circumstances which distinguished our Lord's mission, who taught as no other instructor ever had done, and who confirmed his authority by miracles unparalleled in the history of God's dealings with his chosen people. But though his doctrine was sublime and his conversation perfect, his precepts pure and his actions benevolent,

the bigotted Pharisees, who made void the law by their traditions, persecuted him with treachery and violence; while the Sadducees, who were the philosophical reasoners of that age, treated him and his works with contempt and derision. No words could more exactly or forcibly express the malignity of these enemies of the Gospel, than what the prophet has made them utter in the persons of the unbelievers and libertines of an earlier age. Amidst all this opposition of wickedness, superstition, and scepticism, the Messiah appears to effect that great moral change in the world which had been so long promised and variously prefigured. He comes in the fullness of time to take down the temporary institution, which was no more than the shadow of a glorious structure, where the ceremonials of the law are amplified, felt, and understood, in all the blessings that result from the sacrifice once offered for the sins of the world. The tabernacle framed in the wilderness, and the temple erected on Mount Zion, were typical of this Mediator; for the services performed in these structures were undoubtedly mystical, and had a reference to some distant person and event, which constituted the faith and expectation of the worshippers. When the people lost sight of the great object, and rested in the forms of their ritual, they were always condemned in language of severe reproach; and those very ordinances which the Lord had commanded to be kept, were censured as an abomination in his sight. The intent of all this was to direct their minds wholly to what was represented under these things, and to inform them that the observances of the law possessed no merit but what was derived from the sanctifying influence of His Spirit, who, at the time appointed, should be manifest in the flesh. The evangelical prophet, therefore, having reproved his countrymen for their wilful ignorance and prejudice, ushers in the Holy One of Israel, as

coming to establish that immutable and perfect building, of which the Mosaic system exhibited the general outline.

That church, which is to be gathered out of all lands, begins in Zion ; and there the Saviour proclaims himself as the end of the law for righteousness ; there his doctrine goes forth with power, and there his miracles attest his mission ; while by persecution and death he is thoroughly proved, and his resurrection lays the foundation deep and strong, so that they who rest upon it shall not be moved. Christianity must stand or fall upon the Divinity of its Founder, and in that view only can this prediction be understood ; for the edifice is of a spiritual nature, and is contrasted to that which, being framed with hands, was unavoidably imperfect and mutable. The Jews fancied that their polity was unchangeable, and they trusted to its formularies for acceptance. But the Lord informs them that he will descend, and lay in Zion the basis of another building, which shall endure for ever ; because he will himself be the chief corner-stone. This promise he made good to the fullest extent, and under all the circumstances of suffering and obloquy ; for though rejected by the builders, who were the leaders and instructors of the people, yet a small number of faithful disciples adhered to him, and by their labours the church of Christ arose as the Jewish temple fell ; and while the Gentile nations flowed into the one, the other sunk to rise no more. To us who have been providentially made partakers of this grace, by being incorporated into the visible community of which Christ is the head, the history and prophecy we have been considering, present lessons of caution, while they call for our warmest gratitude and joy. We are here taught, that external privileges, like those to which we have succeeded, must be duly improved to become beneficial ; and that all our works will only

serve for condemnation if they are not done in the spirit of Christ. As there is no salvation but by his perfect sacrifice, so we can perform nothing acceptable before God but in reference to our connexion with this foundation. Our time and talents, all that we are and all that we enjoy, must be employed in the way which He hath appointed, upon whose faith we stand. When we can bring ourselves wholly into this frame of mind, then shall we be secure amidst all the troubles and crosses of life, storms without and temptations within. By this course we shall fully comprehend and feel the rich experience of what is here predicted, and our Lord hath described : " Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man which built his house upon a rock ; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house ; and it fell not ; for it was founded upon a rock." Matt. vii. 24, 25.

JULY THE SIXTEENTH.

THE GOSPEL MINISTRY.

Isaiah, xxxii. 20 — *Blessed are ye that sow beside all waters ; that send forth thither the feet of the ox and the ass.*

IN whatever sense the prophecy contained in this chapter may have been applicable to the time in which it was delivered, no doubt can be entertained of its having a more full relation to that age when the Jew and Gentile were called to enjoy the blessings of the Gospel. The explication has by some been confined to the reign of Hezekiah ; but excellent as the character of that monarch was, the description of the righteous king and his upright court, goes far beyond

all that is recorded of his history, or that can indeed be conceived of any human government. It is customary with this prophet to rise from the consideration of immediate occurrences to anticipate the greater glory of more distant times. In such cases the original circumstances are forgotten, or so far from the grand and variegated spectacle which is presented to the view of the observer, who sketches in rapid succession the wonders that pass before his flaming torch-mind. Thus, while engaged in admiring the happy reign of the prince whose virtues were the pleasing theme of his contemplation, the evangelical prophet is carried far away from thence to behold the expectation of Israel and the joy of the whole earth. Among the eminent qualities of Hezekiah, and the blessings produced by his reformation, we have no account of his extraordinary wisdom, much less do we find that, by his teaching and example, religious knowledge was considerably increased and extended. But under the administration of this great King, and primarily from his personal instruction, the ignorant acquire learning and the timid become eloquent. There is, however, a striking contrariety of effects produced by his public appearance; for though the eyes of those that see regard him attentively, and the ears of the obedient hearken with diligence to his doctrine, the fool still utters folly, and his heart continues to devise iniquity; practising hypocrisy and speaking injuriously against Jehovah: "to exhaust the soul of the hungry, and to deprive the thirsty of drink." Now if this description corresponded with the time of the prophet, it was a more exact picture of that remarkable era when the poor and simple were called to preach the Gospel of the kingdom, with the demonstration of the Spirit and power from on high; while the proud and haughty scoffers persisted, against the word of prophecy and the evidence of miracles, to deceive the people by falsehood and

blasphemy. In consequence of this obduracy and corruption the infatuated nation becomes desolate, "a land of thorns and briers; the favoured city is emptied of its inhabitants, and the forts and towers are turned into dens, the joy of wild asses." From this picture of ruin and depopulation, the prophet turns again to the delightful scene of the Messiah's progress, when the pouring out of the Spirit alters the face of nature in those regions which had hitherto been a wilderness, but are now blossoming like a fruitful field. This change of condition is called the work of righteousness, because it is the effect of that equitable system which the just and wise King has laid down for the rule of his government; and for rejecting which the plantation, once so flourishing, is now become an arid waste, the monument of grace despised, and of privileges abused. This whole prophecy is characteristic of one reign, distinguished according to the events of its dispensation, beginning with the ministry of a few feeble and unlettered instruments, under the teaching of their Divine Leader; but though opposed, like him, by the arrogant and the vicious, the powerful and the learned, still these messengers of truth go fearlessly on, establishing that spiritual kingdom which shall endure for ever. Now, that all this indicates a moral revolution in the internal principles of men, as well as a change in their external condition, is evident from the prediction itself; for we find the two contrasted estates represented under the usual terms of fruitfulness and sterility, the natural result of cultivation and neglect. Let this prophetic painting be compared with what actually took place when the great Teacher of Righteousness came to bring life and immortality to light by his Gospel, and we shall have no occasion to seek for any other application; since the state of the Gentiles, who embraced, and that of the Jews, who despised the mercy, fully

correspond with their respective emblems : " the wilderness is become a fruitful field, and the fruitful field is accounted as a forest."

It is a strong feature in this prediction, that the excision of the Jewish people is represented as the consequence of their folly and blasphemy; of the impiety of their leaders, and the hardened malignity of the nation. All this was minutely verified when the public instructors and teachers of the law took away the key of knowledge; not only refusing to enter themselves into the kingdom of heaven, but them that were entering in they hindered. (Luke, xi. 52.) The combined efforts of all sects and parties to impede the progress of evangelical truth, met with too ready a concurrence on the side of the people; and such was the general infidelity, that they came at last to the dreadful pitch of renouncing their God and King; for while the rulers would admit no other lord than Cæsar, the blinded multitude clamoured for the murder of their anointed Sovereign, with this shocking imprecation, " His blood be upon us and upon our children." How soon this judgment was realized, their history records in awful characters; and the extent of the curse is yet visible in their scattered condition. But let us turn with the prophet to another spectacle, when, as he describes the accession of this universal Potentate, " the man shall be for an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place; as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land."

The first subjects of this mighty Prince are represented as unenlightened and rude of speech; but endued with the Spirit, and taught of God, they not only become wise unto salvation, and deeply instructed in Divine mysteries, but powerful ambassadors, persuasive orators, and skilful instructors. To the labours of these men the prophet points our attention with enraptured admiration, saying, " Blessed

are ye that sow beside all waters, that send forth thither the feet of the ox and the ass." In the symbolical language of prophetic Scripture, the waters denote settled nations, and the ox and the ass are the representatives of two classes of men. Now it was forbidden by an express statute in the Mosaic code to use these animals together in the act of plowing; though it is remarkable that in the prospective scene of happiness before us a blessing is pronounced upon their joint labours. But the law and the prophecy are explanatory of each other: for as the ox figured the inheritance of Jacob, called to be God's people; so the ass stood for the rest of mankind, with whom it was forbidden to make an alliance. But the wall of separation being removed by the coming of Christ, both are called alike into his vineyard; and in the spirit of love they are sent out by him into all lands, having the same authority and the same blessing for their encouragement. We are told, that in the eastern countries it is the common practice to sow rice in watery places or marshy lands, by the sides of rivers; after which oxen and other domestic quadrupeds are turned into those grounds, that by their treading the seed into the soil an abundant harvest may be produced. Thus it was in the primitive age, when the Sower went forth to sow the seed of eternal life beside the waters, or among the different families of the earth; and after the ascension of their Divine Master, the disciples, enlightened by his wisdom, followed the course which he set them, preaching every where; "the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following." Mark, xvi. 20.

JULY THE SEVENTEENTH.

THE EFFECTS OF THE GOSPEL.

Isaiah, xxxv. 5, 6.—*Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped; then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing; for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert.*

THE preceding chapter exhibits the most terrible judgments as falling upon Idumea (or Edom), and the nations confederated with it against God and his people. But so strong is the language, and tremendous the description, that, besides the universal call upon all ages to mark the controversy of Zion, it is plain, from the very nature of the scenery and the events which follow, that the prophetic picture relates to other objects than the ravages of war, and the mere revolutions of kingdoms. The mind, indeed, is carried over plains covered with dead bodies, and mountains flowing down with torrents of blood; the sword of the Lord is represented as having a visible appearance in heaven, and the land, upon which the Divine vengeance descends, is turned into a scorched and dreary waste. Now, though this high-wrought imagery may aptly enough represent a devastated country and a ruined empire, yet there is nothing in the history of those nations to which the attention of the prophet was immediately directed, that comes up to what he has painted in such glowing colours. The very constitution of nature is represented as undergoing an alteration in the devoted region, whose streams are turned into pitch, and the dust into sulphur, which will so continue through everlasting ages; and nothing shall dwell in the offensive spot but birds of solitude and beasts of prey. Allow-

ing as much as we properly may to the hyperbolical style of oriental and predictive poetry, still the application of these dreadful signs to any recorded political convulsions, is destroyed by the assertion, that every particular emblem here introduced shall have its plain and exact accomplishment. "Seek ye out of the book of the Lord and read: no one of these shall fail; none shall want her mate; for the mouth of Jehovah it hath commanded, and his Spirit it shall gather them. And he hath cast the lot for them; and his hand hath meted out their portion by the line: they shall possess the land for a perpetual inheritance; from generation to generation shall they dwell therein." This imalediction, by which a once populous and dominant state becomes, like the cities of the plain, the smoking monument of Divine justice, has but a very faint relation, if any, to the miseries poured upon Palestine and the adjacent countries, by Nebuchadnezzar, or any other ravager of ancient times. The excision must indeed be considered with reference to the glorious state of which the description immediately follows; and where a great moral change is represented by the lively imagery of a wild region putting on a cheerful aspect, and the desert waste becoming joyful and fragrant as the rose. The application of this prophetic description is made clear in our Lord's answer to the inquiry of the Baptist, "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?" For a full solution of their question, the disciples were referred to the works which they beheld, as the most satisfactory comment on the prediction; "Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them." Matt. xi. 4, 5. Thus every word contained in the book of Jehovah, concerning the first advent of the

Messiah, was literally matched by the event; but they who saw his miracles, and heard his doctrine, did not profit by the blessing. When the multitude expressed their astonishment at the healing of the sick and the deliverance of the possessed, saying, "It was never so seen in Israel," the authorized expounders of the law repressed the popular admiration by a malevolent charge, equally ridiculous and blasphemous: "He casteth out devils," said they, "through the prince of the devils." Matt. ix. 33, 34. The people were content with looking on and wondering, when they should have searched the Scriptures, and compared what they saw with that which was revealed, as the characteristic of Him who was to come. But blinded by prejudice, and misled by their teachers, they rejected the Redeemer, who was the object of their expectation; nor did this malignity cease till the infatuated nation, by delivering up the Lord of life, abandoned the promise, and pronounced the sentence of condemnation against themselves. This unnatural act was followed by the desolation of Judea; and the Roman empire itself at last fell beneath the avenging arm of the Almighty, made bare in the heavens. That land which was distinguished by so many extraordinary signs of the Divine goodness, and where the light of religious truth had shone for ages, sunk into a state of gloomy wretchedness, till, in the language of prophecy, it became the habitation of vultures. But rapidly as the sweeping blast of judgment scattered and destroyed those who had confederated against the Messiah and his kingdom, with a still greater swiftness did the Gospel spread and illumine the dark corners of the earth. In a short space after the Ascension, Christianity penetrated into the remotest provinces under the Roman yoke; fixed itself immoveably in the seat of government, overturned the systems of philosophy in the schools of science, and

undermined polytheism even in the very temples. They who had no previous acquaintance with the Sacred Writings received the word gladly, and witnessed a good confession, by forsaking the corruptions in which they had been bred, and laying down their lives willingly, rather than apostatize from the faith which they embraced. This change exhibited in the Gentile world was truly miraculous; for nothing short of the Divine power could have converted both high and low, learned and unlearned, from their superstitious errors and licentious practices, to a system which restrained the appetite and exposed the believer to poverty and persecution. Nothing, surely, but the grace of God could have given the hearing ear and the understanding heart to persons who had never known what was meant by inward purity, and consequently had no idea that man stood in need of a Saviour to redeem him from spiritual bondage, and to make him the heir of eternal life. Yet such was the fact, that while the Jew, whose Scriptures plainly inculcated an opposite principle, rested in the law for justification, the Gentile, contrary to his previous notions and habits, readily accepted Christ, and trusted solely in him for the remission of sins. While the one shut his eyes against the fullness of evidence presented in the institutes of his religion, the prophetic oracles, and the testimony of miracles; the other, without any preparatory culture, the knowledge of the Jewish history, ordinances, or promises, renounced all his prejudices and customs, to trust for redemption only in Christ, who "came and preached peace to them which were afar off, and to them that were nigh: through whom also we both have an access by one Spirit unto the Father." Ephes. ii. 17, 18.

JULY THE EIGHTEENTH.

THE DIVINE HERALD.

Isaiah, xl. 3.—*The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.*

EVERY part of the prophecy contained in this chapter is expressive of some momentous change, to take place in the affairs of men, by the visible manifestation of Jehovah upon earth. Previous to this display of the Divine glory, a solemn proclamation of peace is made, and a harbinger appointed to announce the approach of the heavenly visitant; that they, among whom he is to appear, may be prepared for his reception. The servants of God are also called upon to console his people, by declaring that the time of universal reconciliation is drawing nigh, when the church shall cease from her warfare and bondage, be relieved from painful watching, and delivered out of the hands of her enemies, “to serve her Almighty Saviour without fear.” Still more to comfort the heart of Jerusalem, the assurance is given, that “her iniquity is pardoned,” or that the remission of sins is completely secured in the great expiation, which was shadowed in all the painful services and sacrifices of the Mosaic economy. This atonement, effected only by the union of the Divine and human nature, renders the church “double for all her sins;” or covers them so amply, that they are blotted out, and shall never more be had in remembrance. Having thus declared the nature and extent of that infinite blessing which was about to be revealed, the prophet suddenly repeats the sound of a strange voice coming by the way of the wilderness, proclaiming, with cheerful accents, the advance of

the Redeemer. That this was the voice of the Baptist, when he came from the holy country of Judæa to the banks of the Jordan, and preached repentance as the prerequisite for admission to the Gospel kingdom, is plain from his own assumption of the character, agreeable to what had been foretold of him, "that he should go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways." Now it is not more evident that the ancient church uniformly expected a Messiah, than that she believed he would have a precursor suitable to his dignity. The same prophecies that gave the certain promise of the one, exactly defined the mission of the other; describing him in the style of oriental magnificence, as causing the roads to be made plain and straight, by levelling the hills and filling up the valleys, turning aside the course of rivers, and giving notice that "the glory of Jehovah should be revealed." All this pointing aptly figured the ministration of that wonderful man, who prepared, by baptism, the poor and the contrite for the coming of the Saviour; but who repelled with indignation the proud and bigotted Pharisees, saying, "O generation of vipers! who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" Matt. iii. 7.

The prophetic view of this Divine ambassador represents him as declaring that "All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof as the flower of the field. The grass withereth and the flower fadeth; because the spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it; surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; but the word of our God shall stand for ever." These images set forth the perishable state of the Jewish polity, the end of its ceremonial institutions, and the extinction of the nation. So when John came to usher in the kingdom of the Messiah, he insisted upon the necessity of an inward change, as well as an outward reformation, without

which no plea of national privileges, or the observance of legal rites, could be of any avail to justification. "Think not," said this holy teacher to the leaders of the people, "think not within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father; for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees; therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit, is hewn down and cast into the fire. I indeed baptize you with water, upon repentance; but He that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire: whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." Matt. iii. 9-12. Thus did the prophecy of the Baptist correspond with the denunciation contained in the figurative language of Isaiah, and each prediction was literally accomplished when the temple was destroyed and the Mosaic system removed; when the nation, for its infidelity, was deprived of its power; and the people were scattered and peeled, as the monument of Divine judgment, over the face of the earth. When, therefore, we find that the Son of God did appear in the manner foretold of him, and that his advent was announced by so remarkable a preacher as the Baptist, who yet had no previous connexion with him, we must consider the facts as proofs, amounting to demonstration, that the prophecy was Divine, and was fulfilled in these holy persons. There could be no possible contrivance in the case; for the parties were poor and persecuted; they had no worldly design to promote, nor any interest to gratify; they lived apart from each other, and were put to death on different occasions, and on grounds that had no manner of connexion. So far from seeking to form any establishment that might

secure the safety of their persons, or endeavouring to gather followers from among the wealthy and the powerful, their disciples were chiefly taken from the lowly and the indigent part of the community ; by which means they provoked the hatred of the rulers, who said of John, on account of the austerity of his manners, " he hath a devil ;" but when the Son of Man came, eating and drinking with cheerfulness and urbanity, they said, " Behold a man gluttonous and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners ; but Wisdom is justified of her children." Matt. xi. 18, 19.

JULY THE NINETEENTH.

THE DIVINE LAWGIVER.

Isaiah, xlii. 3.—A bruised reed shall He not break, and the smoking flax shall He not quench: He shall bring forth judgment unto truth.

HERE the Messiah is brought forward in the fullness of his majesty, as the Saviour and Ruler of his church ; but however glorious his progress may be, his personal appearance is described as mild and unassuming. From the meekness of his spirit and the modesty of his deportment, no indications can be gathered of that splendid conquest and extensive dominion which will be his portion. So far from making any loud or pompous professions to collect followers, he studiously avoids public notice, and his voice is not heard in the assemblies of the people. How exactly all this was verified, the Gospel history sufficiently proves, where we find that our Lord withdrew from the grateful multitudes, who would have compelled him to take the regal dignity ; and whenever he performed any signal cure, he

charged the person relieved to conceal the fact as much as possible from general knowledge. Though Jesus went continually about doing good and preaching righteousness, he attempted no innovation upon the national institutions : nor did he assail the public authorities, except when the Divine honour, and the cause of truth, called for morition and reproof. It was said of him in the prophecy, that "he should neither break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax;" which some have understood of his tenderness to wounded consciences, and of the encouragement given by him to awakened sinners ; but though he was in the highest degree distinguished by compassion and forbearance, the prediction had a reference to other objects, and must be considered as descriptive of his conduct towards the state which was the subject of his personal labours. The prophet had before compared the Jewish nation and government to the glory of the field, which should fade away at the opening of a new dispensation. The same thing was denounced by the Baptist under similar images ; but it is here said that the Elect of God, the chosen One, from whom the new law is to proceed, will neither "break this bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax." It is true, the shadowy ordinances of the law must depart, and the whole economy of Moses give way to another polity, administered by Christ himself ; yet will not this Divine Legislator cast away his inheritance for their infidelity, nor suffer the stem of Israel to perish by internal corruption and the yoke of foreign oppression. "I am not come," he observed, "to destroy, but to fulfil the law;" and all his threatenings against the civil and ecclesiastical power were mixed with consideration and affectionate expressions towards the people. He wept over Jerusalem while he predicted the judgments that were to fall upon that self-devoted city ; and when the infuriated po-

palace triumphed in their butchery, and mocked the Holy Victim in his last agonies, he breathed out this prayer, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Luke, xxiii. 34. Thus did his conduct fully comport with what was foretold of his mercy and long suffering to his ancient inheritance; and his special providence hath continued ever since to preserve the seed of Jacob in all lands where they have been scattered, as the monuments of judgment and of mercy. Crushed and trodden to the earth for many ages, they have yet survived all their conquerors; and, as the depositaries of the Sacred Oracles, they may be most truly denominated a smoking memorial of the Divine power and goodness. In the application of this characteristic description to the ministry of the Messiah, the evangelical historian reads the passage with a small, but important, addition: "A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory. And in his name shall the Gentiles trust." It is obvious from this version and explication, that the objects of the Redeemer's kindness, mentioned in this prophecy, are the Jewish people; and that they will continue as a separate community, observing their own religious usages, even in the most depressed circumstances, till the kingdom of the Messiah shall be completed by the calling of the Gentiles. That this ancient stock should be so wonderfully preserved, while the mightiest empires have been crumbled into dust, without leaving the smallest vestige of national distinction behind, cannot be considered as any thing short of a miracle. But when we compare the state of the Jews with what the Sacred Oracles have declared concerning them, the Divine interposition will be apparent; and the reason of their conservation will hardly fail to operate like upon our feelings and our faith; exciting sympathy towards them, and

gratitude to our Saviour and their Preserver. The number of ages, and variety of revolutions, which have passed since his first manifestation, will not shake our confidence in the promise, when we behold this remnant of his primitive family subsisting in every country under heaven, maintaining their ancient customs, and still looking for the hope of Israel. While they are thus bearing witness to the verity of the Sacred History and the word of prophecy, the Messiah, whom their fathers rejected, is still gathering an accession of empire, wherever these monuments of his power and goodness are dispersed. It may rather be said, that the scattered posterity of Jacob follow the footsteps of the Redeemer, and that, without any intention on their part, they become the trophies of his victorious progress, by being the living testimonies of his mission. In all places where the light of the Gospel penetrates, and the name of Christ is received, the descendants of his persecutors are quickly found endeavouring to profit by that civilization, which always flourishes in proportion as the Scriptures are known, and as the doctrines contained in them are professed in their purity. Thus the law, which went out of Zion, continues to spread over the earth : converting distant nations, and making even the adversaries of the Cross the instruments of its glory. But this preservation of Israel has another design ; and, in contributing to the call of the Gentiles, the scattered inheritance are in fact hastening the period when they also shall submit to the sceptre of the righteous King ; for “ of him, and through him, and to him, are all things, to whom be glory for ever. Amen.” Rom. xi. 36.

JULY THE TWENTIETH.

LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS.

Isaiah, l. 10.—*Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.*

AMONG the many excellencies of the prophetic Scriptures, it is not one of the least, that while they continue to be a perpetual and growing evidence in support of Christianity, they abound with principles for the improvement of the mind, and divine declarations for the conduct of life. While the wisdom of God is gloriously displayed in these heavenly compositions, his grace is equally conspicuous in adapting them to our private comfort and edification. There is no situation in which the believer can be placed, no difficulty in which he can be involved, nor any trouble that can possibly distress him, but what will turn to his spiritual advantage, if he applies for counsel to these lively oracles of eternal truth. Here are indeed many dark sayings, to understand which will require close application and deep study; but even these recondite mysteries are blended with communications, from which the simple in heart may gather instruction, and “the wayfaring men who enter upon this course of religious enquiry, shall not err therein.” Is. xxxv. 8. Thus the judgments denounced against unbelieving Israel are warnings in every succeeding age, to those who enjoy equal knowledge; and the promises intermingled with those threatenings, are also designed to cheer the Christian no less than they did the persons who were the original objects of them. When we hear the Messiah complaining of the ungrateful treatment he

received from the people whom he came to save, when we find, that, instead of welcoming his approach with joy, and submitting cheerfully to his government, the nation so long prepared for his advent, by the ordinances of the law and the declarations of the prophets, combined, as it were, with one accord to reject and destroy their Saviour; we are led to wonder at such an unparalleled instance of folly and malignity. But we shall do well, in turning their conduct, and the oracles which attested it, to our own individual improvement, by examining carefully the nature of our principles and the bearing of our deportment, as the subjects of our merciful King. If our profession is the mere effect of custom, and regulated more by the fashion of the world than the operation of the Divine laws upon our hearts, we shall have cause rather to be alarmed by the fate of the Jews, than to reproach them for their blindness and cruelty. The same Redeemer whom they despised and persecuted, speaks now to us in the prophecies that describe his person and in the Gospels which have recorded his glorious acts—but above all in the powerful efficacy of his word and of his life confirmed by the purity of his life and the glorious circumstances attending his death. His foundation was voluntary, and the sufferings to which it unavoidably exposed him, were exactly described in the written word. “The Lord God,” said he, by the prophet, “hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back. I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and reproach.” On comparing this prediction with the Evangelical History, it is natural for us to be surprised that any one should remain a sceptic in the face of such demonstrative evidence: but it is still more remarkable that the Jews, who grounded their expectations of a Messiah upon the prophecies.

should, in flat contradiction to these writings, still look for a temporal deliverer instead of a spiritual one; and indulge the notion, that their prince is to be arrayed in all the splendour of royalty, when their own oracles describe him as "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." Such, however, has been their infatuation ever since the Son of God came in the likeness of a servant; for though the Divine glory shone out in all his words and actions, the nation would not receive him because his parentage was despised, and his country despised. For this perversion of the truth to selfish views and worldly purposes, the people stand condemned in their own inspired Scriptures, and the sentence of divorce is pronounced against them by the Almighty whom they so unworthily treated.

This Light, shining in the darkness of a corrupt age, was attended by a few poor and unlettered disciples, who, moved by no other principle than pious fear and religious obedience, forsook all to follow the Redeemer whithersoever he went. These are the persons described and encouraged in the present passage, forming a contrast to the unbelieving generation to which they dwell. In the language of prophecy, the exhortation is often used as characteristic of the parties to whom the address applies, and descriptive of the line of conduct which it is known they will actually pursue. Thus the little company of believers are called upon to testify in the name of their Lord, and to stay upon them, at a time when they will be deprived of their teachers and involved in perplexity and trouble. What the Scripture enjoined, these adherents of Jesus patiently fulfilled, not only in giving up all worldly advantages for his sake, but by maintaining inflexibly their connexion with him, even after witnessing his excruciating agonies on the cross. The interval between the death and resurrection was dark in the extreme; yet

did not these holy confessors abandon their profession, or break up their communion, when all hope seemed buried in the sepulchre. So far from it, they carefully embalmed his mangled body, laid it in a new tomb, and waited the result with pious fortitude and holy resignation. To this uncommon display of faith does the Divine prediction allude, and both concur in teaching us to rest firmly upon the promises of our Redeemer in all the dark and tempestuous trials through which we may be called to pass during this probationary pilgrimage. If we place before us in constant view the sacrifices and sufferings of the first Christians, who had all the world confederated against them, our crosses and afflictions, so far from depressing, will correct and improve our minds, by directing us to the same stay and refuge which supported the believers of old, and made them utter this triumphant song; "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or wretchedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through Him that loved us." Rom. viii. 35—37.

JULY THE TWENTY-FIRST.

THE CAPTIVE FREED.

Isaiah, li. 14.—*The captive exile hasteneth that he may be loosed, and that he should not die in the pit, nor that his bread should fail:*

AFTER encouraging his people to hold fast their profession without wavering, though surrounded with opposition, the Lord, by his prophet, turns to their persecutors, and threatens them with a fearful destruction. "Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that

compass yourselves about with sparks ; walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. 'This shall ye have of mine hand, ye shall lie down in sorrow.' According to the prediction so was the event ; for the infatuated nation having shut their eyes against the light which arose upon them, and renounced the government of their God and King for that of the Romans, soon experienced the weight of the Divine judgment in the utter annihilation of their civil and ecclesiastical polity. To this abrogation of the Jewish state and Mosaic economy the general attention is again called, in the symbolical language, which represents temporal institutions by the most striking and powerful images in the natural world. The ceremonial system, imparted with such tremendous majesty from heaven, is described as vanishing like smoke ; and the peculiar theocracy of Abraham's chosen inheritance becomes decayed and useless, as a moth-eaten garment. But though the typical institutions are annulled, and the civil government is dissolved, the salvation figured by the former shall endure for ever ; and the moral law, which is the basis of the structure, shall not be abolished. In calling Israel to consider their descent as the posterity of Abraham, the Divine intention was clearly to impress upon their minds the nature and magnitude of the covenant made with the father of the faithful, that "in him all the families of the earth should be blessed." Now this promise obviously pointed to some distant period and person, when and by whom the different nations of mankind should profess the same belief and enjoy the same mercy. The prophecy of Isaiah, in this place, is no more than an explication of that decree, by announcing the Mighty One, who is to fulfill it in breaking down the wall of partition between the Jew and Gentile, and uniting them in a common deliverance. By a very usual figure in scriptural language, the

objects of this great redemption are described as being in a state of captivity, and bound in chains, under the power of an arbitrary oppressor. The same thing was implied in the promise communicated to mankind through Abraham; for when it is said that they shall obtain a blessing by him, the plain sense is, that their previous condition must be such as to render a great moral change necessary to their happiness. The Power, upon whom the stupendous work of universal emancipation devolves, and who in the human nature performs the undertaking which he had stipulated and bound himself to accomplish, is thus introduced: "He marcheth on with speed who cometh to free the captive; that he may not die in the dungeon, and that his bread may not fail. Even I, Jehovah thy God; He who stilleth at once the sea, though the waves thereof roar: Jehovah, God of Hosts; is his name." No part of this prophetic description can with justice be applied to Cyrus; for though his conquest of Babylon proved the deliverance of the Jews, the edict which he passed in their favour was but partially executed in his time; and neither under the auspices of that monarch, nor any other, did this people form a junction with the Gentiles, obtain colonial settlements, or send forth a law to the distant isles. Yet all these things are expressly foretold, as connected with the wonderful achievements of the Saviour, who enters the house of bondage, breaks the chain of the captives, and says, "Verily, not in haste shall ye go forth; and not by flight shall ye march along: for Jehovah shall be in your front, and the God of Israel shall bring up your rear." This is an obvious allusion to the manner in which the seed of Jacob came up out of Egypt, and marched through the wilderness, under the immediate superintendence and protection of the Almighty. Now the same Deliverer and Leader who went before ancient Israel in the

miraculous pillar of cloud and fire, is here predicted to appear in another form, and in a more conspicuous display of his majesty. That manifestation of the Divine presence was typical of the one here predicted; but this glory, and the deliverance effected by it, infinitely transcend all that the Israelites witnessed in their passage through the sea, and various journeyings in the wilderness. The thralldom and freedom which constitute the prophetic theme, being of universal import, must be of a spiritual nature, since it is impossible to understand the junction of all nations in any other than a moral union, as the profession of the same principles. If the blessing, therefore, concerns every branch of the human family, no description of persons can be regarded as exempt, by their previous state and character, from the necessity of it; and this indeed is the Scripture doctrine, which "concludes all men to be under sin." Gal. iii. 22. Such is the state of darkness and captivity in which the posterity of Adam were plunged by his transgression; but their redemption was promised when the offence came, and the manner of it became the subject of many mystic rites and positive predictions. To this recovery of the divine life and liberty, which man lost in his first representative, the prophet directs our attention when he describes the wonderful Child, the seed of the woman, as coming with perfect righteousness to crush the power of the usurper; and having made a full atonement for sin by his death, saying to them who were bound by it under the sentence of condemnation, "Go forth." They who trust for redemption only to the sacrifice offered by the Saviour upon the cross, and who go down in faith with him to the invisible world, shall be made partakers of his triumphant exaltation over hell and the grave. They are here fed from day to day with that bread which came down from heaven; and whatever be their external circumstances, or

however much they may be despised by the proud and the ignorant, **their names are written in the Lamb's book of life.** Enlightened by his spirit and supported by his grace, they are enabled to overcome the world; so that, amidst all the trials and temptations which befall them, the promise is fully made apparent in the comfort which they enjoy, and the example which they set; "If the Son, therefore, make you free, then are ye free indeed." John, viii. 36.

JULY THE TWENTY-SECOND.

THE SUFFERING REDEEMER.

Isaiah, liii. 12.—*Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death, and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.*

FEW circumstances connected with the history of the Gospel are more remarkable than the fact, that, while the idea of a Messiah was prevalent among the Jews, such was their blindness, they resisted the most powerful evidences of his Divinity when he actually made his appearance. But it surely is little less extraordinary, that the scattered descendants of the same people should still continue to cherish the strange notion that their deliverer will be a powerful prince, distinguished by worldly conquests and the permanency of an earthly throne. To us who read the same prophecies on which that hope is founded, nothing can be plainer than the descriptive characteristics of humiliation and persecution, terminating in the violent death of Him who is styled the Holy One of God. It is true, his kingdom is repre-

sented by very glowing images, as magnificent and extensive, populous and immitable; but his personal ministry, before all this can take place, is uniformly set forth in an agonistic view, as a course of labour and suffering. The error of those who rejected our Lord's mission, lay in applying to the probationary state of the Messiah what the prophets have only represented as its effects. Thus by inverting the order of the predictions they fell into the delusion, that the promised Saviour was to be a temporal sovereign and a mighty hero, by whose achievements they were to obtain the ascendancy over all their enemies. With such sentiments it is no wonder that a corrupt and refractory community should treat the spiritual character of Jesus with contempt; but it is matter of astonishment that they who have full opportunity of comparing the predictive marks of the Messiah with the history of his life, and the wonderful change produced by his doctrine, should yet entertain any doubt whether this was the person of whom Moses and the prophets did write. An Apostle who was well acquainted with the real disposition of his countrymen, ascribes their excision to the want of faith, which he more particularly explains immediately afterwards, of their going about to establish a righteousness totally different from what God had appointed. They rested for acceptance solely in the outward services of their ritual, and in the formalities of their law, as enlarged by tradition and commented upon by the craft or zeal of their doctors. Being thus blinded as to the real sense of these ordinances, they turned all that was delivered in the prophecies concerning an offering for sin into metaphor; while, on the other hand, they eagerly seized the sublime accounts of the Messiah's kingdom to build upon them the wildest and most chimerical expectations. But this very fatuity made a part of the prophetic description; and Isaiah, in

the complete view which he takes of the Redeemer's voluntary degradation, begins with the assertion, that the Divine interposition for man's recovery shall pass unheeded by those who witness its power. The promised Saviour riseth up, in the midst of an unbelieving generation, like a lowly shoot from the trunk of a neglected tree, without any distinction or beauty to attract the notice and command the admiration of mankind. Such indeed is the obscurity of his origin and the poverty of his appearance, that the people despise him, and refuse to account him as one of their number. All this exactly tallied with the meanness of our Lord's earthly parentage, and the usage which he experienced on that account from all ranks, who treated him contemptuously as the son of a carpenter, and would not acknowledge him for a prophet because he came from Galilee. Equally particular and appropriate is the description of his clouded life and innocent deportment: "He was indeed a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; he was as one that hideth his face from us; yet he was despised, and we esteemed him not." Of his afflictions we read much, but of his enjoyments we only know that he had neither inheritance nor habitation; "for while the foxes had holes, and the birds of the air had nests, the Son of Man was without a place where he could lay his head." Luke, ix. 58. Thus did he truly come unto his own, who received him not; and so unobtrusive were his manners, that, except when duty called him to Jerusalem, or he was engaged in the public discharge of his ministry, he studiously avoided popular assemblies, and repressed the applauses of those who had been benefited by his goodness. Having fed many thousands by a miracle, he first sent away his disciples, and then dismissed the multitude, who were unwilling to leave him; after which he retired to a mountain, where he spent the night alone and in prayer. So justly did

the oracular description correspond with the circumstances and conduct of our Saviour, that if no other lineaments had been exhibited than these, the resemblance must be confessed by every candid examiner of the prophetic picture and the evangelical history. But the portrait is more minutely marked and accurately defined in the pierced and lacerated appearance of this wonderful and innocent person, who is wounded for transgressions not his own, and judicially stricken for the iniquities of others. He is not merely the object of bigotted fury and unjust resentment, the martyr of truth and the victim of malice, but his sufferings and death are represented as the operative accomplishment of an awful decree, which rendered them necessary to restore peace and to heal a malady otherwise incurable. As a lamb led to slaughter, he neither murmurs nor makes any effort to escape ; and though he is condemned by an oppressive judgment, none of all those who had witnessed his pure conversation and enjoyed the benefit of his miracles, have the virtue and resolution to appear in his behalf. Thus literally was verified in the trial and condemnation of Jesus, all that the prophet had many ages before so graphically described ; " For He was cut off from the land of the living ; for the transgression of my people He was smitten to death." It is impossible to understand this in any other light than that of an extraordinary sacrifice ; for the prophetic narrative positively calls this pouring out of the Redeemer's life by that very term ; and throughout the whole affecting transaction the righteous sufferer is figured by the spotless animal, the shedding of whose blood was the sign of redemption. The language of the prophet is precisely the same with that of the Baptist, when he said to his followers, " Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world ;" and with that of our Lord, where he compares himself to the paschal

victim, "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you." John, vi. 53. The Divine Oracle proceeds yet farther, and having represented the Holy One as suffering by an unjust sentence with malefactors, conveys his body to the tomb of the rich; and while the enmity of the wicked aimed the utter destruction of his memory, it is declared that "He shall see a seed which shall prolong their days, and the gracious purpose of Jehovah shall prosper in his hands." The prophet, who had just before particularized with the utmost accuracy the agonizing death of this extraordinary Person and his honourable burial, goes on to predict the fulfillment of the appointed decree in the glorious establishment of his dominion over many people. Now, as all that is here foretold of the Redeemer's triumph and portion, is expressly declared to be the fruit of his labour and sacrifice, his resurrection must be absolutely necessary to the fulfillment of the promise. He is described as the deliverer and ruler of an innumerable people, "because he poured out his soul unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors; and because he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors." His voluntary resignation of life, then, in that remarkable manner, as a sin offering, is the price paid for the portion which he obtains; and, therefore, to render effectual all that follows, he must revive from the grave, and come with power and conquest from the state of the dead. Without this the latter part of the prophecy cannot be understood; but as it is certain that the body of Jesus, with the permission of the Roman governor, was laid by Joseph of Arimathea in his own new tomb, "being first wound about in fine linen, with spices, as the manner was to bury the rich and great;" we have equal assurance that it did not long remain there, since the whole of what he had predicted came to pass according

to the time appointed. Even before his transfiguration, and while yet there were no indications of his passion, Jesus began to show unto his disciples how that he must "go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders, and chief priests, and scribes; and be killed, and be raised again the third day." Matt. xvi. 21.

JULY THE TWENTY-THIRD.

THE COVENANT OF PEACE.

Isaiah, liv. 17.—No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord.

THE dismal scene exhibited in the last chapter is now changed into a theme of gratulation, joy, and triumph; for heaven and earth are reconciled, and Jehovah himself condescends in person to proclaim an everlasting covenant of peace, by virtue of which the once separated object is called upon to repose with entire confidence in his unchangeable mercy. In the former prophecy the chastisement which was our due, is said to have been fully borne by the Holy Sufferer, who was led as a lamb to the altar, where he endured the iniquities of us all. That sacrifice being completed, the persons for whom it was offered are brought forth from a state of condemnation to the enjoyment of perfect liberty, by the mediation and righteousness of their Redeemer. This community, so wonderfully rescued and graciously exalted, is here compared to a repudiated wife, whose frailty had been the cause of a long and mortifying divorce, but who is now restored to favour by the loving kindness of her Lord. As the face of

nature was renewed after the deluge, and a bond of amity established, by which the Almighty engaged, that "day and night should never cease; nor the waters any more become a flood, to destroy all flesh;" so this eternal covenant, ratified by the blood of atonement, cancels the sentence of wrath incurred by the fall of man, and ensures to all believers the pardon of their sins. The analogy drawn between the redemption of the church and the restoration of the world, is also forcibly stated by an Apostle, in language which, however obscure some may deem it, cannot well be understood in any other light than as extending the benefits of Christ's death to all ages; and among the rest, to the antediluvians, "who were sometime disobedient, when the long suffering of God waited in the days of Noah." 1 Peter, iii. 20. In this prophecy of Isaiah, the covenant of peace established by Jehovah for the recovery of the moral creation, is compared to the one entered into with the patriarch who miraculously survived the flood; and the church thus saved from perdition, planted in security, and made abundantly fruitful, is likened to that vessel which was for a time exposed to the raging of elemental strife, upon the abyss of mighty waters. St. Peter, in the remarkable passage just referred to, has exactly the same similitude, and evidently for the very same purpose; since, as he observes of the refuge provided for the father of the new world and his family, "the like figure, whereunto even baptism doth also now save us; not the putting away the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." That the Prophet and Apostle considered the ark of Noah as typical of the atonement, is plain from this, that both these inspired writers make the comparison and application immediately after they had described the sufferings of a righteous person for the iniquities of others, or "the

just for the unjust, that he might bring us unto God." Both represent the Saviour as pouring out his blood voluntarily, in the way of expiation for sinners, and both describe him coming up again from the state of the dead, as a conqueror and redeemer; who, on account of his submission to judgment in the human nature, and by virtue of his power in the Divine, multiplies a seed that shall prolong their days, or continue to increase, till the consummation of all things. The propriety of the comparison adopted by the two sacred penmen, will appear yet farther, when we consider the respective cases of the natural and moral regeneration; for as the earth was completely overflowed, so that not a single spot appeared on which the foot of man, or beast, or bird, could rest; in like manner all spiritual life was obliterated by sin, and not a vestige of hope remained for creatures who were without the will and the power of raising themselves to that state of holiness which is required of those who see the Lord. But though the mass of animal existence seemed to be cut off when the fountains of the great deep were broken up, the Divine mercy provided the means of renovation in the ark, which floated in perfect safety over the tremendous wreck; and thus did the chosen One, who is called the everlasting Father of a new world, bear the burthen of universal transgression upon the cross, and after passing through the region of darkness and shadow of death, "ascend to the right-hand of God, where angels, and authorities, and powers, are made subject unto him." 1 Pet. iii. 22.

There, in his intercessorial character, he rules over the church, which he has purchased and washed by his blood, and which shall continue to increase and multiply upon earth, by the energy of his Spirit, till the dispensation of righteousness is completed; and when all things and persons, as appointed, are made subject unto him, then shall the Son yield up the

mediatorial kingdom, that "God may be all in all." 1 Cor. xv. 28. With this redeemed communion, gathered from all lands and of every age, he has settled an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure, by which the security of the church is so firmly established, "that no weapon formed against her shall prosper; and against every tongue that contendeth with her she shall maintain her cause." This promise contains an indirect allusion to the means by which the fall was accomplished, and the malice of the accuser rendered for a period triumphant; but, now, since the adversary is crushed, and his power is taken away, by the second representative of man, no temptation shall prevail, nor any charge be brought into judgment against those who have an interest in the covenant of grace; for if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." 1 John, ii. 1, 2.

JULY THE TWENTY-FOURTH.

THE INCREASE OF THE CHURCH.

Isaiah, lx. 22.—*A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation; I the Lord will hasten it in his time.*

It is the peculiar glory of the Christian system, that while every other has to boast the splendour of its origin in the worldly rank or acquired power of the founder, this alone rose out of abject poverty, and flourished amidst incessant persecution. So far from having the aid of wealth and learning, or the formidable co operation of numbers, its Author limited his immediate associates and disciples to a very small

fraternity, and selected them from the meaner and least informed part of the community. He took no pains to secure the patronage of the great, nor did he use any influence with the people to multiply the means of defending himself from the malicious designs of his enemies. During the whole of his ministry, he repressed all notions of temporal grandeur, whenever any such made their appearance among his followers, and instead of encouraging them with the prospect of ease and honour, he frankly told them that he must not only suffer an ignominious death himself, but that they also, in consequence of their connexion with him and bearing his name, should be hated of all men. "They shall deliver you up to councils," said he to his disciples, "and in the synagogues ye shall be beaten; and ye shall be brought before rulers and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them." Mark, xiii. 9. This seems to have been strange encouragement for persons who had abandoned their employments and relations to follow a doctrine which offered no adequate return for the sacrifice. It is true, the Divine Teacher gave them the promise of eternal life; but when we consider the comparatively little efficacy which the hope or fear of futurity has upon men's minds, where the assurance is strong and the duty less difficult, we may rather wonder that any should remain attached to a suffering Master, than that some should go back and walk no more with him. Fanaticism may do much in gaining proselytes, and it may perhaps induce many to encounter great hardships; but the conduct of such persons will always be extravagant, in proportion to the wildness of their reveries and the mysticism of their dogmas. But with respect to the first planters of the Christian religion, it is observable that they were men of timid dispositions and uncultivated understandings, whose habits little fitted them for public lecturing, and whose prejudices were all in

favour of established institutions. Besides, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, instead of administering to the vanity of the teacher or presenting any allurements to the imagination of the hearer, required humility as the first principle, and enjoined a constant subjugation of the passions to the law of righteousness; so far as the plucking out of the right eye and the cutting off the right hand; rather than give offence to the least disciple. The first witnesses to the truth might be forcibly struck with the miracles which they beheld, and charmed with the powerful discourses which they heard from Him who spake as no other man did; but the wonder and admiration would soon have passed away, if their minds had not been influenced by some purer motive, raising them above the world, and uniting their hearts to one who had no honours or riches to bestow. When, therefore, we find that these Apostles, with the exception only of one, and he avowedly actuated by the basest consideration, adhered to their Lord both in life and after his death; what other conclusion can we draw, than that the same Divine Spirit which was in him without measure, impelled them also to go forth in his cause, conquering and to conquer? But the wonder is increased, when we find the wisdom of the philosopher and the superstition of the bigot subdued by the preaching of these illiterate and obscure mechanics. The conversion of the carnal-minded Jew by such feeble instruments is extraordinary, when we reflect upon the prepossessions which were necessary to be removed before he could become a believer in the divine mission of a crucified Saviour; but that the Gentile, who was without any previous acquaintance with the historical record of man's fall and the promise of a Saviour, should abandon his gaudy worship and flexible morality for the simplicity of the Christian faith and the strictness of its discipline, can be ascribed only to the mighty power of God.

The known contempt in which the Hebrews were held by the proud Romans and the polished Greeks, renders the progress of the Gospel as great a miracle, as any that was performed in confirmation of its truth. Yet, with every human means and probability combined against it, this new and strange religion was received by multitudes in the voluptuous city of Corinth, the rich and superstitious Ephesus, and, among many other places, Athens itself, the seat of learning, of scepticism, and dispute. Thus in less than a century from the ascension, that light which arose upon the banks of the Jordan darted its cheering beams across the Mediterranean sea, to the very heart of the empire, and passing over into Spain, extended itself to the shores of Britain; which might be truly called the region of darkness and the shadow of death. In all this the immediate power of Heaven was manifest; for nothing but the Divine agency could have made that doctrine effectual which was adverse to the received opinions and prevalent usages, wherever it came. While the Jewish nation rejected the Lord of Life, and continued to heap up wrath against the day of evil; the Gentiles "flocked into the communion of the church as the doves into the windows;" the distant isles gladly welcomed the joyful sound of a Saviour, and "their ships may be said to have come laden with offerings to the name of Jehovah and to the Holy One of Israel." The prophecy was completely fulfilled in every part of its sublime description, "for the little one truly became a thousand, and the small one a strong nation;" and the increase was hastened, or made abundantly great, within a short space of time. Even the conquerors of the world became unwittingly the carriers of the Gospel; and the Jews followed after, to grace the triumph, and to become witnesses of its truth. This accomplishment of the Holy Oracle gives us an assurance that the work so wonderfully begun, and graciously

continued, shall still go on with an over-ruling influence, amidst all the contentions and corruptions which human or infernal malice may raise against it, till the proclamation shall be made, "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever." Rev. xi. 15.

JULY THE TWENTY-FIFTH.

THE SPIRITUAL JUBILEE.

Isaiah, lxi. 1, 2.—The Spirit of the Lord-God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.

THE Mosaic institution was distinguished by certain remarkable statutes, which ordained that every seventh, or, as it was called, the sabbatical year, should be observed with joyful solemnity, in the entire cessation from agricultural labours, the remission of debts from one Israelite to another, and the manumission of servants. The benevolent provisions of this law were farther extended at the seventh septennary, or the fiftieth year, in the complete emancipation of all bondmen, and the restitution of estates to their original owners. This last festival was called the Jubilee, because it was proclaimed throughout the land by a particular sound of the trumpet, and this was done in all the highways and other public places some time before, that the people might be duly prepared for the assertion of their national privileges. The political benefits of

these usages were many and important, as hereby the poor became content in the station allotted them, and the rich were restrained from any undue encroachments. Liberty and property were accurately defined; and while every fair advantage was given to the wealthy part of the community, care was taken to prevent the necessitous and improvident from becoming the prey of the cunning and avaricious. The bond of servitude was lightened, and the toil of labour was sweetened, by the consideration, that the year of release drew nigh, when the servant would be as his master, and the captive be restored to his freedom. In the view of the same joyful season the distressed Hebrew was consoled under the temporary loss of his patrimony, with the reflection, that it was secured by an immutable law, and would revert again to his family undiminished in its value and without any tedious procrastination. But this ordinance had a specific object of another kind; and while it contributed to the personal comforts of the people, it pointed their hopes to the fulness of days, when the legal bondage should be done away, and man be reinstated in his forfeited inheritance. The typical design of the institution is clearly expressed in this prophetic dialogue, where the Messiah proclaims his consecration and the purposes of his mission to the church, who hails his approach with gratitude, anticipates the renovation of nature, and predicts the diffusion of his righteousness among all nations. He who was anointed by the Spirit to communicate these blessings to mankind, began his ministry at Nazareth with this very passage of Holy Writ, which in the public synagogue he applied directly to himself; for having read the prophecy aloud to a large and attentive congregation, he closed the book and said, "This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears." Luke, iv. 21. By that day our Saviour did not mean the particular sabbath

when his words were uttered, but the whole period of his visitation, which therefore corresponded with what the prophet calls "the acceptable year of the Lord;" and the witnesses to the fulfilment of the oracle were not the members of that identical assembly, but the whole existing generation, among whom his wonderful works were wrought. But it may be objected, that, whatever miracles our Lord performed, he opened no prison-doors, nor relieved any captive from his chain; that, so far from reviving the jubilee according to the ancient forms, he scrupulously avoided all concern in men's temporal affairs, and submitted himself to the payment of tribute. The answer to all this is obvious, if we confine our attention to what was figured in the original institution. Here the cancel of debts, the restoration of property, and freedom from service, reminded the Israelite of his national history, and of the miraculous deliverance which his fathers experienced when they were brought forth from Egypt by the visible manifestation of Jehovah. Now that slavery, which they endured for so long a period, was but a faint resemblance of the degraded condition in which human nature was plunged by the fall, and of the darkness spread over the moral world by the dominion of sin. Salvation from such a state could be no work of man, who was under condemnation as a transgressor of the law, and become the vassal of the evil one; nothing but an act of sovereign grace could remit the claims which infinite justice had against him; and nothing short of the Divine Power could bring him again to the free use of his spiritual faculties, so as to render his services acceptable in the sight of God. Such an interposition was foretold at the commencement of man's wretchedness; and this blessing constituted the whole intent of the Mosaic economy, which was only the "shadow of good things to come." The jubilee was

a grateful commemoration of the redemption experienced by the seed of Jacob, and it represented also that still greater mercy, which, through their instrumentality, was to unite all ranks and descriptions of men in one righteous community. There was no respect of persons in this great festival, which therefore happily depicted that era, when by "one Spirit all are baptized into one body, whether Jews or Gentiles, whether bond or free." 1 Cor. xii. 13. Though our Lord did not in the literal sense abolish slavery by any interference with the peculiar polity of states and the customary practices of his time, he did more than all this, when he laid down principles and precepts, which necessarily tend to ameliorate the condition of mankind, even with regard to their outward circumstances and relative connexions. The doctrine which he preached raised the poor to a participation of the same mercy with the rich; and while it encouraged the one to endure their privations with patience and holy submission to the Divine will, it required of the latter the constant exercise of good works, according to the talents which God had given them for the benefit of their brethren. During the actual residence of the Redeemer upon earth he relieved many afflicted persons, whose deplorable cases defied the aid of all mortal skill; but the blessings described in the prediction extended much farther than these miracles. He truly poured balm into many broken hearts, by healing their maladies and raising their friends from the dead; but his atonement continues to bind up the wounds of penitent sinners in every age and country, restoring them to health in the forgiveness of their sins, and raising them to newness of life by the power of his Spirit. That "acceptable year" which the prophet foretold and our Lord announced, dawned upon Judea, and spread its cheering light over various regions, that for ages had been covered with darkness and polluted

with idolatry. Thus the captivity of the heathen world was turned into the liberty of the sons of God, and they who were long bound in the icy fetters of ignorance and corruption, arose at the joyful sound, and became the willing subjects of the righteous King. The Jew, indeed, refused to share the proffered blessing with his destitute brother; for which infidelity and unkindness he cut himself off from the inheritance, and became a standing memorial of mercy and judgment. But while we contemplate this strange abuse of the Divine goodness, and wonderful obduracy in resisting what was calculated for the benefit of mankind, let us remember that the period of profiting by this grace is limited, with respect to us, as it was to the chosen people of God; and that unless it be improved according to the opportunities which we possess, it will only aggravate our condemnation.

As in the ancient jubilee men were called by the sound of the trumpet to claim the privileges which it bestowed, so are we now invited by the Gospel to become partakers of that redemption, which can be obtained by no other means, nor at any future period; "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." 2 Cor. vi. 2.

JULY THE TWENTY-SIXTH.

THE CITY OF GOD.

Isaiah, lxii. 12.—*They shall call them, the Holy people, the redeemed of the Lord: and thou shalt be called Sought out, a city not forsaken.*

WE have heard the proclamation of the Messiah, declaring his consecration and giving notice of his approach, that those who are interested in the ob-

jects of his mission may be prepared to enjoy the blessings which he has to bestow. To this Divine call the church returns a grateful answer, exulting in the change of her condition, and eagerly anticipating the glory which will distinguish her Lord's appearance. The Redeemer confirms her hopes by the gracious assurance of a permanent establishment and an abundant increase. "For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth. And the Gentiles shall see or acknowledge thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory; and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall fix upon thee." By this new name is to be understood another dispensation, though it is observable that even in a literal sense the prediction was fulfilled by the communication of the Mediator's peculiar title, as the anointed one to his church, every member of which is also directed to be initiated by baptism into that communion, in the name of the Saviour. Now it is certain, that from the giving of this prophecy to the ascension of our Lord, the Jewish state never obtained any new or honourable distinction; and it is no less true, that after the appropriation of the Christian name to the disciples at Antioch, the civil and ecclesiastical polity, so miraculously imparted and wonderfully preserved, fell rapidly into decay till the judgment of Heaven, agreeable to the Divine denunciation, sealed its doom. The holy people, then, to whom the promises belong, are those believers who accept the offered salvation and obey the call, to prepare for the coming of their Redeemer. They are here denominated in their first state, "the sought out," or, as the original might be more correctly rendered, the "greatly desired;" which appellative denotes both the fervour of their

own affection, and the free grace by which they are called out of darkness into light.

After all the mighty preparations made in the law and the prophets, the signs of the Messiah's coming produced but a faint impression upon the nation at large ; and when he actually made his appearance in the demonstration of the Spirit, and with the visible power of Jehovah, his disciples were few and contemptible in the world's account. And it deserves serious consideration, that even these persons did not enter upon this extraordinary profession with any previous qualifications, neither was their attachment to the Divine Teacher the consequence of a cautious and studied investigation of his pretensions. They were truly "sought out," and taken from the lowest and most unpromising condition, that, as the instrument of this new plantation, it might be manifest to the whole world the work was of God, and not the effect of human skill and contrivance. With this view, when our blessed Lord drew near his last and most painful trial, he administered both comfort and caution to his faithful attendants, who were about to go forth, clothed with his authority and acting in his name, for the gathering of the church. "Ye have not chosen me," said he, "but I have chosen you and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain ; that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you." John, xv. 16. Their success was commensurate with the promise, in the faith of which they acted ; and the church erected by their joint labours, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, became the wonder of the earth, "and the gates of hell were not able to prevail against it."

That holy city, whose inhabitants are called the redeemed of Jehovah, is founded upon the rock of everlasting love, and shall continue to increase in the accession of new subjects till the vintage shall be

fully ripe; "when they that have gathered it shall eat and praise the Lord; and they that have brought it together shall drink of it in the courts of his holiness." But this pledge of security to the church, and promise of yet more glorious times in the second advent of her Lord, is attended with a note of distinction, which requires strict self-examination and constant watchfulness. The persons to whom these privileges belong are only those who have been redeemed, which of course implies that they were before in a state of bondage and slavery; which was strictly true of the Gentiles, who were sunk into the most wretched abjection of mental darkness and corruption. But the same is equally the case with every human being; for however much we may boast of our civilization and superior attainments, nature is the same with us as in the wildest regions of the earth. The mere outward lessons of truth and moral maxims of propriety, which we acquire by living under the civil advantages that have flowed from the Gospel, will not entitle us to the high distinction mentioned in the prophecy. There must be an internal work of redemption in the rescue of the mind from the dominion of sin, and an entrance by faith into "the liberty which belongeth to the sons of God;" and the power of which enables the weakest believer to witness a good confession by overcoming the temptations of the world. That external profession, in which too many rest as the ground of their hope, is a vain and miserable delusion; for while they, like the ancient and unbelieving Jews, fancy that a name and communion will procure the Divine approbation, and that great zeal is a mark of love and sincerity, sufficient to cover many defects, the King of Righteousness will say at the consummation of his church, "I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity." Matt. vii. 23.

JULY THE TWENTY-SEVENTH.

THE MIGHTY DELIVERER.

Isaiah, lxiii. 1.—*Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save.*

THERE is a beautiful gradation and connexion in the prophecies, the sense of which unhappily becomes obscure, and is frequently lost to the reader, by the artificial distribution of the whole, without any regard to the order, into chapters and verses. The advantages derived from this division, however great they may be, are more than counterbalanced by the injury done to the entire piece in the dislocation of its members, and the confusion necessarily produced by separating those parts which can only be understood in their natural order. The effect of this disunion is particularly felt in the opening of the chapter before us, where an uncommonly grand character makes his appearance, as it were abruptly, and holding an intercourse with persons of whom no account is given in this place. But if we turn back to the preceding prophecy, we shall find that certain watchers were appointed to look out day and night for the coming of Jehovah, in allusion to those officers of the temple, whose duty it was to declare the hours by public proclamation, as well for the purposes of business and security as for those of devotion. From the going forth of the commission, which announces the consecration of Messiah to his mediatorial dignity, there is a regular series of events predicted relative to the formation of his church, the qualifications of its members, and the fate of its enemies. These watch-

men, then, are the chosen witnesses of redemption; the personal observers of the wonders foretold, and more especially of that victory by which man is saved from the destroyer, and enabled to rejoice over death and the grave. In the morning watch, the persons stationed upon the walls of Zion are represented as struck with the vision of an extraordinary figure, advancing with peculiar majesty, by the way of the wilderness, from that part of Idumea called Bozrah. That these names are mere symbolical appellatives, is evident from their etymology, and the application of them to the object here described; for Edom signifies "red as blood;" and Bozrah denotes "a vintage." In the language of prophecy, the adversaries of the church are commonly denominated by the names of those nations which were the most inveterate opponents of ancient Israel, among whom the principal were the Idumeans, Egyptians, and Babylonians. Some expositors, losing sight of all that is sublime and spiritual in the Sacred Oracles, have affected to discover in the description of this Divine conqueror, Judas Maccabæus, whose character, great as it was, never warranted the lofty port and high attributes which are assumed by the mysterious personage, who alone encounters and defeats the formidable power combined against his people. Besides, the land properly called Idumea had changed its inhabitants long before the time of that eminent captain, by the incursion of the Nabatheans, who completely expelled the Edomites, and forced them to settle in the southern parts of Judea. But independently of this consideration, and the peculiar manner in which the warrior speaks of his achievements, there are other circumstances from whence we must infer that somewhat more than a human conflict is here intended. The mighty person who astonishes the watchers by his sudden appearance, blood-stained garments, and dignified deportment,

expressly avows that he stood alone in the combat, and that no being whatever shared with him either in the toil or the victory. He also declares that the tremendous contest in which he had been engaged was for the benefit of others, and not any personal concern of his own; that when he perceived their case to be hopeless, because no one interposed on their behalf, his zeal prompted him to undertake the cause of the afflicted. In reply to the first inquiry of those who hail his approach, he announces righteousness as the matter of his communication, and salvation as the blessing which he has to bestow. By the former is to be understood something very different from what is implied in the ordinary translation, which conveys hardly any higher sense than that of one who speaks with truth, whereas the original means literally the making righteousness public where it was before unknown. This righteousness is revealed as that which the Mighty One hath accomplished or procured by his labours, for the salvation of his redeemed in the determined year, or appointed season of their visitation. The period here mentioned corresponds exactly with that described in the commission of the Messiah, as the "acceptable year of the Lord;" and this of course shows the true character of the speaker in this place, the nature of his conquest, and the objects of his kindness. The anointed of Jehovah is the Mighty Saviour, the announcer of righteousness, who comes up from the mystical Idumea, and from the very central seat of its tyrannical domination, over which he has obtained a complete triumph, and the marks of which appear upon all his vesture. In the original proclamation, stating the purposes of his mission, it is declared that he will open the doors of the dungeon and set the captives free; which display of benevolence towards the miserable, is accompanied with the denunciation of vengeance against their oppressors.

The redemption of these captives is in the nature of a voluntary sacrifice on the part of their gracious Deliverer, who endures for them the judgment due to the offence which brought them under condemnation. Having so humbled himself, he descends into the region of darkness, from whence he comes up as the morning light, and is discerned with amazement by the watchmen of Zion, who express their mutual surprize at such an unusual spectacle appearing in the quarter of death.

While the chosen witnesses were struggling with fear and hope, timidity and admiration, the unknown traveller cheered their spirits by the avowal of his name and dignity; "I that publish righteousness, mighty to save." It seems that they were still wavering with doubt, and could scarcely yield to the evidence of their senses; but would fain be made minutely acquainted with the reason of his ensanguined appearance, which he condescends to explain at length, and in language of uncommon sublimity, declaring that "he had trodden the winepress alone;" which figure of a vintage denotes both the enduring of judgment and the infliction of vengeance. The Mighty Saviour has done both; for as he bore the indignation of Divine justice against sin, and suffered inconceivable agony of soul in the garden and upon the cross; so when this trial was finished, he entered upon another scene of action in the dominion of the enemy, whose power he crushed and whose legions he defeated. Having thus opened the dungeon, and brought life and immortality to light, he became the first fruits of them that slept, and said to his wondering disciples, "Handle me and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have." Luke, xxiv. 39. Thus did the warrior go forth alone to the field of battle, and come up again covered with the trophies of victory; by which he opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers.

BUT perfect as this victory is on the part of the Saviour, in his conflict with the powers of darkness; yet the warfare of his redeemed church must go on upon earth, till the whole shall be completed in the subjugation of the nations to the dominion of the righteous King. Having triumphed over death and hell, this Mighty One, "clothed with a vesture dipped in blood, and whose name is the Word of God," placed himself at the head of the select company whom he had chosen, and who, as his mouth, preached that doctrine which they had received from him, with the demonstration of the Spirit and the power of God. That small and persecuted band soon grew up into a countless host, before whom neither the subtilty of science nor the violence of superstition could oppose an effectual resistance; for though weak in themselves, and untaught in the schools of human wisdom, they had a Divine teacher and leader, "who hath on his vesture, and on his thigh, a name written, KING OF KINGS, and LORD OF LORDS." Rev. xix. 16.

JULY THE TWENTY-EIGHTH.

THE NEW CREATION.

Isaiah, lkv. 17.—*Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind.*

THE mystery of grace which forms the prevailing subject of the Scriptures, and particularly of the prophecies, is uniformly described as the renovation of the world, in the destruction of evil, and the removal of all obstacles that lie in the way of perfection; in short, as being the recovery of what was lost, and the improvement of human nature, by the

restoration of original righteousness. Every promise contained in these oracles tends to remind us of the primeval state, when man lived in amity with his Maker, and when all the creatures were peaceably subject to his dominion. Divine revelation imparts so much of our original history as to make us sensible that the change has been more than the simple degradation from the station of superior intelligence ; and that to some sad defection must be ascribed all the errors that prevail and the miseries of which we complain. With this revolution in the faculties of man, the constitution of the material system suffered a proportionate alteration, and natural evil kept an equal pace, at least, with moral. So long as the earth shall produce noisome weeds and poisonous plants, the animal tribes maintain a hostile character, and the elements prove the most terrible sources of destruction, so long shall we have perceptible evidence that our place of abode has either undergone some great mutation, or that it has not arrived at the state intended by its Author. The preponderance of calamity, and the prevalence of iniquity, must therefore ever be an insuperable difficulty in the way of the sceptic, who has to account for the miseries which he beholds, on the ground of immediate utility and future advantage. He must reconcile these discordancies with the idea of absolute perfection in the Eternal Mind, or else he will have no other refuge from the perplexities they induce than gloomy scepticism, which ends in the horror of atheism. Happily for the believer in revealed truth, he is not abandoned to the maze of conjecture, in a matter which affects his present comforts no less than his future happiness. He knows that the entire creation, as it came from the Divine Author, was not only good, but that it would so have continued if man had faithfully preserved his trust, instead of marring his inheritance. But the same venerable records

which explain the cause whence all these disorders primarily spring, do also communicate the information, that a new state of things shall arise in the reign of Him who was foretold when the offence came. The same prophecies which describe the victory of the Redeemer over the enemy of man, represent all nature as smiling and becoming fruitful under the Messiah's government. While the ferocity of the savage is subdued by kindness, and the rudeness of the barbarian is converted into polished manners, the atmosphere becomes salubrious, and the earth repays with constant fertility the labours of the cultivator. Rivers are made to flow in the sandy desert, and the once arid waste is covered with a luxuriant vegetation; trees of the greatest usefulness and beauty are planted and flourish in the wilderness; the desolate land looks like the garden of Eden; and by a very expressive figure it is said, that the "earth hears the corn, and the wine, and the oil." Hos. ii. 22. Now, admitting that this rich description is to be understood principally of some great moral improvement among men, yet the frequent use of the same imagery, and the direct allusions made to the paradisaical state, when all the creatures were harmonious because man was innocent, plainly shows that the whole has a literal as well as a spiritual sense. But the one is in fact a consequence of the other: for as the lapse of the first man occasioned a visible and general depravation throughout the various orders of terrestrial beings, and even in the frame of the globe itself; so the blessing of redemption brings with it the means of correcting those disorders which have for ages prevailed in the world, and never could be eradicated by the efforts of legislators or the wisdom of philosophers. This is no hypothetical assumption; for evidences as innumerable as the stars of heaven prove beyond all question, that the light of the Gospel, like that of the first day, is an active

principle, which, by giving life to the moral system, restores the dignity of man, and directs all his pursuits to the universal good. What the prophets foretold as the effects of the Saviour's reign, however highly wrought up in the style of eastern eloquence, is no hyperbolical representation, when we consider the magnitude of the subject, and the wonderful exactness with which the predictions have been fulfilled. Wherever the knowledge of Christ has come with power, and the glad tidings of his salvation have been received with joy, it is not sufficient to say, that the dispositions of the believers have undergone a favourable change, but the very character of society has taken an impression from the blessing. The progress of the Gospel has proved the sure but gradual amelioration of mankind in every country; for it has united them by a common principle, and regulated their connexions by a universal rule. Nor is it too much to say, that even the very constitution of the natural world has been essentially improved by this inestimable gift; for those wandering hordes who had no other occupation than war, and who acknowledged no law but their appetite, have entered the bosom of humanity; and the regions which they rendered a terror, have in consequence become the seats of learning, arts, and commerce. Populous cities have risen where impassable thickets afforded only a shelter to the lurking serpent and beasts of prey; while around extensive fields, with vineyards and plantations of various kinds, flourish for the advantage of men in different orders and stations of life. Agriculture is not one of the least of those useful employments which have followed, with the most salutary effect, the cheering influence of this divine and benevolent system. By bringing men to the knowledge of their Maker, they are made sensible of their mutual interests and obligations, which, at the same time that it stimulates to individual exer-

tions, begets also trust and confidence in each other. It would be easy to show that the present highly cultivated state of the world in the urbanity of manners, the improvement of science, and the spirit of industry, has followed the slow, but majestic march of the Christian profession; and this might be further strengthened by the remarkable fact, that in proportion as any country hath departed from the purity of this faith, in principle and in practice, so in like manner hath it invariably suffered a degradation in the scale of civilized character. Of this we have a striking instance in the servile condition of those people to whom the Christian doctrine was first imparted; but who by their corruptions forfeited that sacred deposit, and with the light of the Gospel lost also that of human science. The land which they inhabit, though possessing every natural advantage, seems to have shared the judgment, and is become literally, from a fruitful field, a lamentable desert. But even this made a part of the Divine predictions, and on the same authority we expect another change: for as the "kingdoms of this world must all in their course become the kingdoms of our Lord;" so when that consummation takes place, "shall the tabernacle of God be with men, and he will dwell with them; and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes: and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying; neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away. And He that sitteth upon the throne will say, Behold, I make all things new. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end." Rev. xxi. 3—6.

JULY, THE TWENTY-NINTH.

CONSUMMATION OF THE CHURCH.

Isaiah, lxvi. 24.—*And they shall go forth and look upon the carcases of the men that have transgressed against me : for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched ; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh.*

THIS chapter has a necessary connexion with the preceding, and illustrates the new creation there described, by indicating the time when it shall begin, and the revolutions with which it shall be introduced. The excision of the Jews forms the principal subject, and a very lively picture is here drawn of their hypocrisy and superstition, which corresponds exactly with the character of these people, at the period when with affected zeal they brought sacrifices to the altar of God, and yet slew the anointed One whom he sent. For rejecting him they are threatened with the loss of their polity and their utter extinction as a nation ; while to the faithful few who believe the Divine word, and on that account are persecuted by their unrighteous brethren, the promise is given that “ Jehovah will appear with glory, to their joy, and the confusion of his adversaries.” And what the prophet foretold was truly accomplished ; for in proportion as the Gospel spread among the Gentiles, by the preaching of those men who had been cast out of the Jewish communion, so rapidly did that state itself decline ; and the temple, which was the object of their pride, was razed to the very foundations. The ministers of vengeance came against this apostate nation as a whirlwind, and literally accomplished its destruction with fire and sword. But while all the calamities here foretold fell in quick and terrible succession upon Jerusalem, the chosen

messengers of Jehovah made his fame and glory known among the heathen, who on their conversion became the ready instruments in proclaiming the truth which they had embraced to other parts of the earth. Thus the light which went out of Zion extended over various regions, and being communicated from one people to another, never failed to effect a powerful change in their moral character and external condition. All the valuable arts, and every liberal endowment, have flourished according to the influence of the Gospel upon the minds of men; and even those communities which retain their ancient prejudices most tenaciously, have been benefited in no inconsiderable degree by their intercourse with the professors of the Christian faith. Civilization having made its way in many wild regions by the force of their labours and the effect of their example, has softened the rigour of superstition, and produced that spirit of inquiry which tends gradually to make men religious and industrious. Even the Jew himself has been preserved by virtue of his connexion with those who acknowledge him as their elder brother; and this is among the many striking evidences of the truth of prophecy and of the Gospel; both concurring in this, that the restoration of Israel shall follow the conversion of the Gentiles. This remnant of God's ancient family has indeed suffered bitterly from those who imagined they were doing honour to the cross, by acting in direct opposition to His conduct and precepts who suffered upon it. But when the doctrine of Christ revived, and the spirit of liberty arose with it, the seed of Jacob partook of the blessing; and in every country where the Gospel is professed in its purity, their temporal comfort has increased and their mental character been improved. In all this we may clearly perceive that gracious Providence, which, agreeable to the sacred predictions, keeps this remarkable people insulated in

the great mass of society, to be the monuments of truth and the vessels of reserved mercy. Their whole history and peculiar appearance, whether viewed as enduring the fires of persecution, or enjoying the gentle and liberal intercourse of toleration, is a full confirmation of the prophetic decree, "As the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, saith Jehovah, so shall your seed and your name remain." Thus it appears that the renovation of nature is the establishment of a new religious system, which, by exalting man, corrects the evils that surround him, and imparts even a salutary influence to its inveterate enemies. When this Divine process shall have arrived at the secret, but fixed period, according to the counsels of Heaven, the means of conversion will be so abundant and successful as to overcome all opposition; and "there shall be one fold and one shepherd." John, x, 16. That glorious event will, however, be preceded by great changes and tremendous convulsions; for though the call of the Jews will assuredly crown the triumph of the Messiah at his second advent, that resplendent period will not arise till his avowed enemies have been subdued. Every antichristian confederacy must be defeated, and all corruptions purged away, before the Redeemer's kingdom is settled upon earth. War and persecution shall try the faith and patience of the saints; but while they watch with diligence, and submit with pious resignation to the leadings of Providence, the proud and sensual, the fearful and unbelieving, will disregard the signs of the times, and set themselves furiously in opposition to the progress of truth. Such are the characteristic features of the latter days, drawn by the spirit of prophecy, which subjoins likewise for our instruction, that these appearances will be accompanied by an extensive diffusion of knowledge and an eager desire of information. But amidst all the portentous lights

which blaze in the heavens above, and the revolutions continually occurring upon the earth beneath, so prone will men be to prefer human before divine science, that in the "superabounding prevalence of iniquity, the love of many shall wax cold." Matt. xxiv. 12. Thus between the first and second advent of Christ there will be a remarkable similarity; for as the Jewish nation continued stupid and malevolent, notwithstanding the wonders which he wrought and the doctrines which he preached; so the mere nominal Christians, who have made the loudest declarations of religious zeal, will be the most indifferent to his cause and adverse to the increase of his kingdom. The warnings which shall awaken those who have long been proverbially dead, will have no other effect upon the carnally minded professors of the Gospel, than to stir them up against new converts and sincere disciples. But the work of grace must receive its completion in the gathering of the people to Mount Zion, whence they shall behold their adversaries cast out as in the valley of Hinnom, where "their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched."

JULY THE THIRTIETH.

THE DANGER OF ERROR.

Jeremiah, vi. 16.—*Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein.*

THE inspired author of this book was of sacerdotal origin, and, like the Baptist, he had the eminent distinction of being ordained to his exalted office in

the womb. He began to receive the Divine communications at a very early age, and continued to warn his countrymen of the dangers attending their infidelity above forty years. Having discharged his arduous trust with strict faithfulness, in different reigns and the most unfavourable circumstances, he was suffered to remain in Judea, after its conquest by the Chaldeans; but when Johanan, with the remnant of the Jewish forces, retired into Egypt, he compelled the prophet and his disciple, or amanuensis, to accompany them. According to very respectable tradition, Jeremiah closed his honourable, but painful, labours in that country, by laying down his life for the truth; being, as some say, stoned to death by the idolaters, whose folly he reprovèd; or rather, as others relate with more probability, by the hands of his unbelieving brethren, whose hearts became hardened in their misfortune; and instead of venerating him by whom it had been foretold, they persecuted, and at last murdered him for his fidelity. So much of the prophet's personal history is interwoven in his writings, as to show his own character in the clearest light, while at the same time it illustrates that of the age in which he lived.

This collection of record and prediction exhibits a dreadful picture of national corruption and insensibility, opposed with increasing force and malignity to repeated calls of mercy and threatenings of judgment. It may seem unaccountable to some, that a people favoured with so many special monitions from Heaven, and who had besides experienced such signal instances of prophetic verity, should fall into delusions, the fallacy of which was obvious, and persevere in practices which were equally ridiculous and abominable. But the cause of all this folly and wickedness is perfectly clear in the Divine remonstrance, which may be considered as a summary of the communications made by the Almighty to the

Jews, and in the reply, which is an exact representation of their disposition and conduct. "Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein." The depravity of their principles, then, was no more than the common effect of apostasy, and the judgments impending over them for their impiety were the natural consequences of a vicious choice. All this agrees with a former expostulation, where the infatuation of this favoured family is rendered odious, by being contrasted with the different behaviour of the nations whom they affected to imitate. "Pass over to the isles of Chittim, and see; and send unto Kedar, and consider diligently, and see if there be such a thing. Hath a nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods? but my people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit. Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be ye very desolate, saith the Lord. For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." Ch. ii. 10—13. It certainly does appear extraordinary that the Gentiles, whose worship was contrary to reason, and whose faith could not stand inquiry, should yet adhere inflexibly to their superstitious notions and usages; while the Israelite, with the Sacred Volume in his hand, and indubitable evidences of its Divine origin before him, was ever ready to abandon the truth for the wildest absurdities and customs revolting to humanity. But the fact, dark and melancholy as it may be, is a corroborative proof of the declaration so forcibly stated in these oracles, that man is "born like the wild ass," prone by nature to follow his passions and to resist the controul of discipline; to abuse the gifts of Heaven, rather than to profit by them in the improvement of

his reason. He yields readily to vice and folly, but recovers slowly to virtue and the proper exercise of his judgment. The apostasy of the chosen family, therefore, instead of weakening the authority of revelation, may justly be adduced in support of its origin and excellence. If this code had relaxed the rule of morality, and given a latitude to sensual indulgence, the people would not have renounced the faith of their ancestors for a mythology which was unintelligible. But as truth demands diligence and inquiry, so it is the property of error, in religious matters, to weaken the mind, by drawing it off from the study of first principles and the practice of necessary duties. The substitutes which it offers for what is divine and immortal, are those things which flatter vanity and encourage indolence, gratify present desire, and remove the fear of futurity. All these accommodations to the evil propensities of man, were spread abundantly in the superstitions of the Gentile world; and hence the descendants of Jacob were so uneasy under the restraints of an opposite system, which required the entire submission of the human will to the law of God, the preparation of the heart for a spiritual service, and the sacrifice of personal convenience to the general good. But they did not forsake their religious system altogether; for, like most men who love sin and have some dread of its consequences, they endeavoured to reconcile discordancies, and to mingle the follies of the heathen with their own ritual. By degrees even these scruples gave way, and they fell into the grossest corruptions, without feeling any remorse. In the course of this delusion they were called repeatedly, by the ministers of truth, to "stand still and consider their ways;" to ask for the old paths in which their fathers experienced the blessing of Jehovah, who promised, that, if they returned to him in the same direction, they should find rest in their souls. Thus we perceive

that this nation was treated as made up of intelligent and accountable beings, who were masters of their own thoughts and responsible for their choice. The Almighty does not demand a blind and implicit faith, but an impartial examination and comparison of their present state and former condition. They are indeed informed, that the only means of obtaining the Divine favour is by retracing their steps and returning to the doctrine and worship of their fathers; but at the same time they are told that this must be done with willing minds, in a spirit of free inquiry and sincere repentance. This is indeed the only sure method of correcting error; and though it implies labour and mortification, in the renunciation of old habits and improper connexions, it is that which infallibly leads to security and happiness. But too many, like the Jews, become so wedded to their sinful customs and vain imaginations, that they resist the conviction of truth, with all its evidences, replying by their actions to every warning of Providence and monition sent to them from above, "We will not walk in thy ways." From this instance we are taught to be cautious of attending to novelties in matters which may in the remotest degree affect the primary articles of our creed; and therefore, to avoid being entangled in the pollutions of the world, which are the certain consequences of evil principles, we should carefully guard the avenues of our minds from every deception that has a tendency to lessen our attachment to the tried foundations of religion, "holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away, concerning faith have made shipwreck." 1 Tim. i. 19.

JULY THE THIRTY-FIRST.

THE RESTORATION OF ISRAEL.

Jeremiah, xvi. 16, 17.—*Behold, I will send for many fishers, saith the Lord, and they shall fish them; and after will I send for many hunters, and they shall hunt them from every mountain, and from every hill, and out of the holes of the rocks. For mine eyes are upon all their ways.*

PROPHECY is a continual and growing evidence of religious truth, and one that will ever be of universal interest, though to appearance it may often seem to be of momentary concern, and of a mere local application. Even those predictions which have been obviously verified in ages long since passed away, and by the instrumentality of nations now no more, still afford abundant matter of comfort to the believer, and instruction in righteousness, both to individuals and public communities. Here we discern the course of God's dealings with mankind, in the due apportioning of his visitations to their deservings, while at the same time mercy is mingled with judgment, and the chastisements inflicted upon one generation are so administered as to prove an inestimable blessing to another. Thus the punishment of the chosen people, who were scattered abroad in various countries, though it was a heavy calamity to them, became the means of spreading the knowledge of their remarkable history, and particularly of the oracles which conveyed through them the promise of universal redemption. The same prophecies which foretold the dispersion of the tribes, by assigning the causes of it, taught this lesson of practical import and of general utility, that national crimes are productive of those evils, which in their very nature bring on the decline of one state and the rise of others. Much

as the Scriptures had been neglected and abused by those to whom they were specially imparted, the fulfillment of what was denounced in these writings, could hardly fail to impress the minds of many with awful admiration, if not with deep compunction and sincere repentance. When, therefore, the Hebrews became planted among the Chaldeans, who were noted for their scientific attainments and inquisitive disposition, the extraordinary records possessed by the captives, and the wonderful matters delivered in them, must unavoidably have excited the attention and curiosity of the wise men. On comparing the declarations contained in the prophetic books with the events which had befallen the persons to whom they belonged, these enlightened observers must have been forcibly struck by the exact accomplishment of what was threatened; and this of course would induce an eager inquiry concerning the great mysteries that, according to the same inspired writings, were yet to be revealed. The house of Israel and the house of Judah are said to have been sown in other lands; which figurative expression not only denotes their preservation, but fruitfulness also, for the benefit of themselves and the people among whom they dwelt. Now, though this might be true, in no small degree, of the generations who were carried into captivity by the powerful invaders of Palestine, yet the prophetic description certainly extends to the latter days, and to the mutual advantages resulting from the settlement of the Jews among the Gentiles, after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. The miraculous continuance of the seed of Jacob in all parts of the earth, and under the most depressing circumstances, plainly indicates some specific and remote design in the purposes of Providence, even if we had not the positive assurance of revelation for that belief. But the recovery of these people is as explicitly stated as their general dispersion and long

captivity; and Jeremiah declares that they shall be gathered in different ways, and at two distant periods of time. The objects restored by the first dispensation are represented as discovered and collected by fishers, which may probably mean some maritime states; but, according to the symbolical language of prophecy, is rather to be understood of a great conversion effected by the faithful diligence of persons whose hearts shall be powerfully inclined to this good work, and whose labours will be crowned with an abundant success. When this division of the ancient inheritance shall be brought home to their God and King, the other branches, who have been more widely separated, will begin to be collected, but with considerable difficulty and by slow degrees, on account of their altered appearance, the change of manners, and the obscurity of their retreat. The description which the prophet gives of these people agrees with surprising minuteness to the state of the scattered Israelites, properly so called, who are indeed under the watchful guidance of the Almighty, but are unknown to the rest of the world, and even to their own brethren. Recently, indeed, some extraordinary discoveries have been made in the heart of China, and on the coast of Malabar, which, by bringing us acquainted with part of the dispersed tribes, may in time lead to the knowledge of the rest. Thus it is evident that, "as the eyes of the Lord have ever been upon the posterity of Jacob;" to preserve them in "the mountains, and the hills, and the holes of the rocks," to which providential wisdom originally carried them for their iniquities; so shall Divine grace, in the time appointed, bring their descendants forth from thence with power and great glory, "that they may inherit the land of their fathers." For the consummation of this happy union and establishment, the believer will not only be anxious to prepare his own mind, but to contribute

by his endeavours and his prayers, saying constantly, in the language of the church, "Have mercy upon all Jews, Turks, Infidels, and Heretics, and take from them all ignorance, hardness of heart, and contempt of thy word: and so fetch them home, blessed Lord, to thy flock, that they may be saved among the remnant of true Israelites, and be made one fold under one shepherd, Jesus Christ our Lord."

AUGUST THE FIRST.

THE RIGHTEOUS BRANCH.

Jeremiah, xxiii. 6.—*In his days Judah shall be saved and Israel shall dwell safely; and this is his name, whereby he shall be called, The Lord our Righteousness.*

THAT the Old Testament is in general so little understood, arises from the want of considering it in connexion with the New, and the neglecting to study it by the light of evangelical illustration. Many prophecies must appear very mysterious and unintelligible to those who have slight notions of the great scheme of redemption, which forms the entire subject of the Gospel; and this dispensation again cannot be fully comprehended without a knowledge of all the steps by which it was introduced. Though the promise of a Saviour was given immediately after the fall of man, several ages elapsed before it was renewed, and confirmed in the covenant made with Abraham. The patriarchal dispensation subsisted in a wandering and insulated state many years, to which succeeded a long time of trial in Egypt, where the chosen people were, to human appearance, in danger of losing their faith and hopes in the extinction of their liberties. But when they were reduced

to the most abject condition, Divine goodness interposed for their deliverance, and brought them out of the house of bondage with a mighty hand. Even after this miraculous display of mercy and judgment, it was deemed necessary, for wise and benevolent purposes, to make the emancipated nation lead a migratory life in the wilderness, where all their history was a continued scene of wonders, typical of some secret design in the councils of Heaven for the benefit of the human race. To the same great object must be referred the establishment in Canaan, and the various circumstances which followed that conquest, till the separation of the kingdoms in the excision of Israel and the temporary recovery of Judah. The chain of prophecy very much resembles that contained in the history, and for the same reason, because what the one represented the other predicted; and though both lead to a universal blessing, yet much of the intermediate narrative and description is necessarily of a local nature and partial application. The civil and religious institution of the Hebrews was the settled channel of conveyance, by which the long-expected benefit was to come, and therefore all the circumstances attending this remarkable nation are of importance, as having a bearing to His advent, in whom all the families of the earth shall be blessed. We should regard the prophetic writings in the same view, and then, however obscure or of particular concern some passages may seem, it will be found that they have an incidental relation to the mystery of grace, either with respect to the first or the second coming of the Messiah. This two-fold appearance of the same Divine Person is so expressly and repeatedly foretold in the Sacred Oracles, that no more doubt can be entertained of his glorious manifestation for the perfection of the church, than of his incarnation and passion for her redemption. Whatever difficulty, then, may occur

in the prophetic books, on the subject of his personal dignity and the splendour of his reign; the restoration of Israel and the wide extent of his dominion, in the call of the Gentiles, will be cleared up when we refer the predictions which affirm these events to the consummation of the Redeemer's kingdom, instead of its commencement. Keeping this distinction in mind, we shall be enabled to comprehend the economy of revelation; and our faith, with regard to what is hidden, will be strengthened by reflecting upon what has already taken place. Some of the prophets describe the Messiah as coming in his appearance in a poor and low station, as a neglected shoot issuing from the stem of a withered tree; while others represent him as the flourishing branch of a royal house, equally distinguished by holiness, poverty, and permanence. Isaiah, in his accurate painting of this wonderful Person, sets before us in all the particulars of his affliction, his great expected sufferings for human transgression, and his glorious triumph, comparing the same figure of vegetation to that of the true vine, under whose shadow "Judah shall be saved and Israel shall dwell safely." The former great prophet says, that the Redeemer, so miraculously to be born, shall be called "Immanuel, or God with us;" and the latter declares that the name of the Prince who completes the glory of David's line, is "Jehovah our Righteousness." Both these appellatives have in fact the same signification, and denote that the illustrious Person to whom they belong will be acknowledged, or confessed, to be the Divinity in human nature, undergoing this voluntary humiliation for the recovery of man, and the restoration of that righteousness which was lost by the fall. But if the word be taken in its strict meaning of justice, then also will the application of it to the Messiah be most suitable, since in our nature he bore all that was due to our offences, and by virtue

of his perfect sacrifice he brought in eternal redemption for us. Hence he is called the Tree of Life, because through faith and repentance sinners have now free access to the throne of grace, and are so renewed by the power of his spirit as to be denominated the children of God. The reign of this righteous King, though it began in circumstances very dismal and unpromising, cannot be expected to increase and prosper, excited by the art of sophists and the malice of persecutors. But if it be objected, that Judah has not yet been fully saved, and that Israel, scattered by the sword, is scattered and almost exterminated, we may answer, that both promises shall be fully verified, because every other prediction concerning the chosen seed has had its complete accomplishment.

The plant which isued, as it were, from the dead trunk of the old law, and rose to all appearance out of the ruins of the Jewish nation, is a wide-spread-
 ing tree, which covers the fowls of the air, or
 over which the beasts of the field, securely repose, varying in
 manners, perhaps, but all submitting to the same law
 and professing the same worship. Now as all this
 was no more than what had been foretold by the
 ancient prophets in express terms, we have from
 thence an abundant assurance that the remainder of
 the Holy Oracles shall be fulfilled in due time; and
 that Judah and Israel will therefore be gathered and
 dwell safely in the enjoyment of that liberty which
 belongeth to the sons of God, when there shall be
 one Lord in all the earth, and his name shall be
 one, even "Jehovah our Righteousness." To this
 agrees that declaration of the Apostle concerning the
 great Head of the church, "At the name of Jesus
 every knee shall bow, of things in heaven, and
 things in earth, and things under the earth; and
 every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
 to the glory of God the Father." Philip. ii. 10, 11.

AUGUST THE SECOND.

THE JUDGMENT OF BABYLON.

Jeremiah, li. 56.—*The Lord God of recompences shall surely requite.*

ON comparing the page of history with the word of prophecy, the mind is drawn to a near and awful view of the Divine administration; and the more we study the records of past events with the oracles which foretold them, the clearer will be our ideas of the wisdom and goodness of Providence. We here see that every evil is ministerially applied to the correction of others, and that the domination of one mighty power is made instrumental in bringing about purposes which were not in the contemplation of the ambitious founders and servile agents. While men are carrying on their own vengeful and politic schemes, an overruling Intelligence directs their operations much farther than was intended, or even thought of, by the authors; so that from scenes the most distressing, occurrences arise, which in their consequences prove a blessing to distant ages. The evil inclinations of the chosen people brought them into a nearer communion with the heathen nations than was consistent with the original constitution of their state, and the nature of their religious establishment. Had they remained contented in the privacy of their condition, and with the simplicity of their manners, the proud and rapacious adventurers of the East might have passed them unnoticed; but this propensity to foreign customs and contempt of their ancient laws, drew them into connexions which ended in the dispersion of Israel and the captivity of Judah. When Nebuchadnezzar carried away Zedekiah in chains to Babylon, and removed the unfortunate Jews from their own land, he was actuated by

no other motive than that of personal aggrandizement, by adding to the number of his slaves. But though the settlement of this extraordinary people in Babylon might seem of trivial import, the secret Disposer of all events made the judgment which he inflicted the means of producing distant good. The long residence of the Jews in that vast city, which was the resort of many nations, was of no ordinary magnitude, since it contributed to make known the Sacred Oracles, of which they were already in possession, and those which were from time to time imparted by living prophets, for their comfort and instruction. While, therefore, they suffered the punishment due to apostasy and ingratitude, Infinite Wisdom prepared by their means the way of the Gentiles, who by this intercourse became acquainted with the history of man's fall and the promise of his redemption. At the commencement of the visitation which befell Judah, after so many gracious warnings and accumulated transgressions, no human sagacity could have anticipated the recovery of the outcasts from the tyranny of that mighty empire, which had absorbed them in the immensity of its population. Yet the messengers of God were authorized to mix the word of consolation with that of reproof, and to assure the sufferers, not only that their misery should have an end, but that the power of their oppressors should be destroyed. The prophet, who had laboured so earnestly to save his people from ruin by calling them to repentance, foretold the destruction of Babylon seventy years before the event, and at a time when that city was in truth the mistress of the world. The manner in which the whole was accomplished by Cyrus, agreed so minutely with the predictive description, that the unbeliever cannot possibly get rid of the prophecy without previously invalidating the testimony of all the ancient historians, who, if they had any knowledge of the Sacred Writings, were adverse

to the truths contained in them. There are two particulars denounced against Babylon, which, as corresponding with what actually took place, utterly defy all the effrontery of scepticism to elude, or the ingenuity of philosophical criticism to explain. It was expressly declared, by inspiration, that the waters of Babylon should be dried up and her rivers laid bare, so as to become passable; which was the case when the conqueror turned the course of the Euphrates, and made the bed of it fordable for his troops, who entered the city while the inhabitants were revelling in security. This capture of the place by surprize, and in the midst of general ease and festivity, was thus also minutely stated in the judgment, which Jeremiah made known to the captives, for their consolation under the heavy affliction which to all human appearance had cut them off for ever from their native land. "One post shall run to meet another, and one messenger to meet another, to show the king of Babylon, that his city is taken at one end, and that the passages are stopped, and the reeds they have burnt with fire, and the men of war are affrighted. The violence done to me and to my flesh be upon Babylon, shall the inhabitant of Zion say; and, My blood be upon the inhabitants of Chaldaea, shall Jerusalem say. Therefore thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will plead thy cause and take vengeance for thee; and I will dry up her sea, and make her springs dry. And Babylon shall become heaps, a dwelling-place for dragons, an astonishment, and a hissing, without an inhabitant. They shall roar together like lions; they shall yell as lions' whelps. In their heat I will make their feasts, and I will make them drunken; that they may rejoice and sleep a perpetual sleep, and not wake, saith the Lord." The extinction of this renowned city, as well as of the empire to which it belonged, is a resistless evidence of the truth of prophecy, and

affords a certain assurance that every remaining prediction in the word of God shall have its accomplishment in the appointed time. As old Babylon fell when its work was completed, so shall the mystery of iniquity, figured under the form of a city, and called by the same name, sink beneath the mighty waters; while the redeemed church, seeing and admiring the Divine verity, shall exclaim, "Alleluia. Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power unto the Lord our God: for true and righteous are his judgments; for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand." Rev. xix. 1, 2.

AUGUST THE THIRD.

TRUE PATRIOTISM.

Lamentations, ii. 14.—*Thy prophets have seen vain and foolish things for thee; and they have not discovered thine iniquities, to turn away thy captivity; but have seen for thee false burdens and causes of banishment.*

PATRIOTISM is a virtue to which all men lay claim; and even those persons who contribute most to the national danger, by the irregularity of their conduct and the prostitution of their talents, will affect upon all occasions an uncommon zeal for the public good. But he who neglects his own duties, and who disregards the moral and religious character of his associates, can have no real love for his country, whatever warmth he may display against abuses, or ingenuity in devising schemes of improvement. The man who has really the interest of his fellow-creatures at heart, will endeavour to allay

their turbulent passions; and if he cannot aid the state by his counsels, he will at least serve it effectually by his example. While the factious and intriguing, the crafty and ambitious, make it their perpetual study to excite popular discontent, and to weaken the authority of government, the man of pure benevolence strives to promote peace among his neighbours, by the moderation of his sentiments and the mildness of his deportment. He neither complies with the vices of the great, nor flatters the prejudices of the ignorant; he seeks for no applause but that of his conscience; and, alike insensible to the allurements and contempt of the world, he constantly recommends a radical reform of principles and manners, as the only sure means of advancing public and private happiness. To the corruptions and calamities of the age he is not indifferent, for that would argue a want of feeling totally irreconcilable with his profession; but he labours to correct the one by his virtues, and to avert the other by his prayers. Such was the spirit of the ancient saints, whose actions are set forth in the Sacred Records as models of the religious temper and of holy living. In the darkest times, and under the most provoking circumstances, the Divine messengers proclaimed the word of truth with faithfulness to princes, and the duty of obedience to their subjects; denouncing judgment upon the one for their impiety, and calling the nation to repentance, that they might not partake of the evil. The prophet Jeremiah was a remarkable instance of ministerial fidelity and exemplary loyalty; for though he was commissioned to deliver the keenest reproaches to the rulers, who bitterly persecuted him for his integrity, he uniformly taught the people that their only refuge from the threatened scourge was in personal amendment and newness of life. When the measure of iniquity was completed, and the Chaldeans, like an overwhelming flood,

ravaged Judah, whose principal inhabitants they carried away to Babylon, the heart of the prophet was deeply oppressed by the sight of woes which he had long foreseen and frequently predicted. He poured out his sorrow amidst the ruins of Jerusalem, in a strain of poetry so affecting, that the sighs and the tears of the writer seem to be heard and felt in every line and word of these exquisite elegies.

In the dolorous complaints, penitential confessions, and pathetic descriptions, which the prophet partly delivers in his own person, and partly in that of the afflicted church, we are taught many important lessons of faith and practice. We see here the heinous nature of sin, and that every vicious indulgence, however lightly it may be deemed, is pregnant with mischief to a whole community, and extends its baneful effects to many generations. Hence we learn that the conduct and character of every person in society, as having some degree of relative influence, will be found to have a concern in the general guilt, and to merit a proper share of the punishment. The length of time in which Judah was spared, and the numerous warnings she received, show the long-suffering of God towards those whom he has enlightened with his word; and the tremendous visitation of that state by the incursions of a barbarous foe, whose enormous empire afterwards became totally extinct, as plainly proves that even the wicked are appointed for the day of evil, to be the instruments of Divine wisdom and justice. From the language of the prophet to afflicted Zion, we learn that the primary cause of her distress was the treachery of those who were bound, by their station and abilities, to have made the people acquainted with the error of their ways and the misery to which they led. Instead of humbling the national vanity and stemming the torrent of iniquity, the public instructors went with the stream, and acce-

lerated the ruin of their country by prophesying smooth things, and cheating their hearers with a false report of the dangers which surrounded them. These profligate teachers were active and zealous enough in misleading those whom they ought to have guided in the path of repentance; and, in the usual spirit of all deceivers, they assigned other causes for the general misfortunes than the idleness and luxury, the immorality and profanation, which prevailed in every rank of the community. When they could no longer deny the existence of the evils which pressed upon the devoted kingdom, these impostors still contrived to make the people believe that their vices and infidelity had no share in the calamity. What happened to Judah through the arts of the wicked acting upon national credulity and depravity, is an exact picture of the deceitfulness of sin, by which individuals and societies are brought to destruction for the want of seeking in themselves the true springs of the miseries that befall them. If, instead of palliating our faults, we examine our thoughts and ways with a fixed resolution to correct and amend what is wrong, then will the Divine blessing attend our search, and restore us, at least, to inward peace, if not to external prosperity; for "in the way of righteousness is life, and in the pathway thereof there is no death." Prov. xii. 28.

AUGUST THE FOURTH.

THE VISION OF GLORY.

Ezekiel, i. 28.—*This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord.*

THE prophet Ezekiel was one of those captives who were carried into Chaldaea with their king, Jchoiachin,

about eleven years before Nebuchadnezzar completed the affliction of Judah, by the destruction of its city and temple. This inspired messenger was, therefore, contemporary with Jeremiah, and, like him, he reproveth the people sharply for their transgressions; denouncing at the same time heavy judgments upon their adversaries and oppressors. But the style of these sacred writers varies in the extreme; for the one is grave and plaintive, simple and historical; while the other is ardent and terrible, figurative and mysterious. It has been well observed, that "Prophecy was a business in which the intellect of man, under the controul of the inspiring Spirit, had an active share; and accordingly the composition owes much of its colouring, but nothing more, to the natural genius and taste of the writer. And hence it is that such a variety of style is found in the works of the different authors of the Old Testament, all equally inspired*." To this judicious remark we may add, that the variation of manner was also necessary, according to the different circumstances of God's people, and the objects of the several missions that were sent to them. Ezekiel seems to have been raised up in a foreign land, and enlightened in an extraordinary degree, to preserve his countrymen from falling into that specious philosophy which placed all things at the disposal of two independent principles, the one good and the other evil, with their respective agents and dependencies.

This pernicious doctrine deprived man of the strongest motive to virtue, by making him the sport of contending powers, and representing him as acting under the influence of an arbitrary necessity. To set off the plausible delusion more effectually, it was adorned with the splendid machinery of numerous

* Bishop Horsley's Letter on the Eighteenth Chapter of Isaiah, p. 78.

orders of spiritual intelligences incessantly at work throughout nature ; sometimes producing harmony, and at others discord, according to the preponderance of the good or evil beings in the system of the universe. Such was the superstition to which the chosen people were exposed in the country where they were settled ; and it was the more dangerous, because it tended to draw the minds of the captives from the real cause and design of their suffering, by laying the whole upon the malignity of fate, instead of ascribing it to the just judgment of God for their sins. The prophet, therefore, was admitted to a near view of the Divine government in its internal economy, that he might explain to the afflicted congregation in Chaldaea the mystery of Providence and grace, agreeable to the symbolical forms of their ancient faith. Thus they were instructed in the real meaning of those venerable institutions, and comforted with the assurance, that all the promises connected with them should receive their full accomplishment in the exact order and time laid down in the plan of Infinite Wisdom. The vision with which Ezekiel was favoured on the banks of the river of Chebar, exhibited a most sublime representation of the Divine presence operating alike in the visible and invisible worlds, connecting all periods and controuling all events. This wonderful scene opened with a whirlwind, which, as coming from the north, indicated the position of the city and temple of Jerusalem. The tempest aptly figured the judgment which had fallen upon that state, and the dispersion of the chosen seed ; but the cloud and fire involving itself, as forcibly expressed the power and goodness of God in the preservation of his church. What Ezekiel saw in Chaldaea, corresponded with the emblematic sign manifested to the shepherd in Horeb, where the lambent flame seemed to threaten the entire destruction of the bush, which, however, remained safe

amidst its fury. The Inhabitant of that glory afterwards conducted his people through the wilderness, under the same forms as those which were now seen by the prophet; but it is observable, that while the mercy-seat of the tabernacle was distinguished by only two cherubim, the prophetic vision contained four, representing the several dispensations of God to man; from the paradisaical state to the patriarchal covenant, the establishment of the law, and its abrogation by the Gospel. As in all these revelations the promise of redemption was conveyed under different forms, so we find that amidst the remarkable varieties of the cherubim the humanity is made conspicuous, while the Divine nature involves and prevails over the whole. The straightness and form of the feet belonging to these living creatures, denoted the immutability of the Divine word, and the steadfastness of every engagement; while the wings, acting in conjunction, not only shadowed the progression of time in general, but the regular succession of events, according to the predetermined counsel of the Most High. The same important truth was still farther delineated in the wheels, which intersected each other, yet preserved an equal motion, and went forward by the impulse of a uniform power. The course of the world is often perplexing to the most serious and sagacious observer, who finds it utterly impossible to account for many changes in nature, on the principles of utility or benevolence. But revelation informs us of what the prophetic scene so beautifully describes, that we are only parts of an immense machine, the magnitude of which is too vast for our conception, and the continued operation of which is "like the noise of great waters." Amidst the jarring confusion of the elements, and the strife of men, the order of Providence is pursued without diminution; and when to shortsighted mortals there appears no room for hope

the wisdom and goodness of God are made as evident as the sign of the covenant in the heavens after rain. The stupendous and complicated system is under the immediate direction of one Will, in subservience to which innumerable ranks of spiritual beings are perpetually employed; some embodied in matter cognizable by our senses, and others far beyond our comprehension. Much may be left to the moral will of these creatures, according to their several capacities; but none of their deficiencies can affect the Divine glory, or injure the great plan of operations, which is fully known to Him alone, whose mind originated and whose power upholds all things. Each of these rational agents is indeed accountable for his individual motives and conduct; but whatever may be the effects resulting from the improper choice of individuals, or the revolutions produced by the errors of nations, the believer will have reason to join the host of worshippers in their grateful hymn of praise: "Alleluia; for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth." Rev. xix. 6.

AUGUST THE FIFTH.

THE DUTY OF REPENTANCE.

Ezekiel, xviii. 27.—*When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive.*

No doctrine is more clearly laid down in the Scriptures than the sovereignty of Divine grace in the redemption of man; and yet no duty is more frequently enforced, as an essential requisite to that blessing, than repentance. By the fall we are said to be dead in trespasses and sins; so that it is not in the power

of any one to turn effectually unto God, whose word, however, commands us to forsake our sins that we may find mercy. This representation, in the estimation of many, involves the precept in an unaccountable difficulty, by rendering the performance of it impossible without superior light and assistance. The language of these superficial reasoners amounts to this, that if the human mind be sunk in darkness, and if the moral faculties are from their first development prone to evil, no error can be culpable, and exhortations to virtue must be fruitless. From the distortion of great truths, the most pernicious delusions have obtained an extensive currency; and while some have become infidels through a proud self-sufficiency of intellect, others resolve all religion into outward form or mental feeling. The philosopher being foiled in his endeavours to reconcile the freedom of the human will with the infinite intelligence of the Deity, binds the whole system in the chain of necessity; and the misguided believer, who takes a narrow view of revelation, applies particularly what was intended for general purposes. The corruption of man is indeed universal, and nothing less than Divine wisdom and goodness could have provided a remedy for the evil. But though the human will naturally tends to the choice of evil, because man knows nothing of abstract purity, and therefore obeys the impulse of his passions and the propensity of his appetite; the principle by which he is enabled to make his choice between two objects, may by instruction be made sensible of what is right, though it is too weak to avoid the wrong. Mutilated as the Divine image is in the mind, enough of the original impression remains to show the excellence in which it was created, and to convince every man who compares his character with others, that there is a beauty in virtue and a deformity in vice. Reason, however, can go no farther than this discovery, with all its

exertions, and therefore it is unable to settle any system of moral action by a fixed rule, because the laws which wisdom may enact are void of a universal motive and a sacred sanction. Now the volume of revelation, by making us acquainted with our original state and fallen condition, alarms our fears, that it may rouse our hopes, and incite a spirit of inquiry after the means of regaining the Divine favour. Here we find, that no sooner did the offence come, than the promise of mercy followed the judgment; and the next thing we read of is the institution of animal sacrifices, as the appointed medium of reconciliation. The same expiatory rite was afterwards expanded with a variety of typical forms in the Mosaic ritual, to show the heinous nature of sin and the infinite holiness of God, who will not accept any creature defiled with it, till an atonement is made for his transgression.

These institutions showed the unbending strictness of Divine justice; and every part exhibited the dreadful state of man, who saw in these burthensome and painful services the absolute necessity of holiness, and his own want of it, without a mediator. The moral law laid open the same tremendous truths in detail; and conscience, on hearing its precepts, must have convinced him how grievously he had fallen short of obedience in every respect. Thus placed between the accuser and the judge, the awakened mind had no refuge from despair but in the satisfaction for sin, which was mystically shadowed in the various offices of the ceremonial system. But the mere sacrifice of the altar was of no avail without the offering of the heart in faith, and a deep humiliation for its manifold enormities. Thus repentance was taught throughout the whole of the legal establishment; but we see that it was a repentance which could not procure the pardon of the worshipper, without a propitiation as an acknowledgement of

his sin and an entire reliance upon the Divine promise. What the law united in its visible forms, the Gospel lays down as the rule of righteousness; for that faith which does not spring from repentance, is dead and unprofitable, because no one can truly apprehend the value of that holiness without which no man shall see the Lord, unless he is thoroughly made sensible of the malignity of his moral disease. Repentance, therefore, must be such a godly sorrow for sin, as lies in the power of every person to feel who hears the law by the voice of his conscience, and in so doing pronounceth his own condemnation. In whatever way this law is imparted, the object of it is called by the communication to repent of his sins; which he must abhor in the same proportion as he had before desired and cherished them.

Some men are sorry for their errors, because they dread the consequences of them; but they have slight notions of the defiling nature of sin, and they endeavour to excuse their guilt by comparing it with the depravity of others. Confession like this is mere hypocrisy; but still more abominable is the mockery of those who strive to unite light and darkness, by professing an exalted faith in God and great zeal for his glory, while in their deeds they deny him by dishonouring his laws. Many such, it seems, were among the Israelites; but the Divine word informs them, that while the "most wicked man may find acceptance and save his soul, it is only by turning from the error of his ways, and doing that which is lawful and right." To constitute true repentance there must not only be a hatred of sin, and a complete renunciation of it, but an assiduous cultivation of every principle, and the practice of every duty, in which the sincere penitent is conscious of his deficiency. Where this grace begins in the spirit of deep humility, its evidences appear in a change of life, and all the marks of a renovated temper; for

a "good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit." Matt. vii. 18.

AUGUST THE SIXTH.

A FORSAKEN PEOPLE.

Ezekiel, xx. 25.—*Wherefore I gave them also statutes that were not good, and judgments whereby they should not live.*

THIS is one of the passages against which the cavils of infidels have been levelled with more splenetic wit than argument, taking the literal construction of the words, as involving a sense derogatory to the Divine justice. Now, though the translation might be so amended as to remove the difficulty altogether, yet even the declaration, in its present state, may be shown to advance a clear and sound truth, conformable to the ordinary administration of Providence, and perfectly consistent with the most enlarged ideas of Infinite Goodness. The whole chapter is a history of God's dealings with the family of Jacob, from their deliverance out of Egypt to the time of the captivity and dispersion, in which Ezekiel prophesied. The exalted privileges of this people are contrasted with the base and servile spirit which led them to adopt the corruptions of other nations, and to renounce the salutary statutes and judgments imparted to them from above, for the sinful and destructive practices of the heathen. That the chosen seed, who were so peculiarly enlightened above the rest of mankind, should prefer the slavish principles and degrading customs of idolaters to the sublime doctrines and instructive ordinances of pure religion, must be considered as affording a melancholy evi-

dence of the truth, that the heart of man is deceitful above all things, and so desperately wicked as to be incomprehensible.

It is the favourite opinion of many, that the love of truth and virtue is natural to man ; but all history shows the contrary, and the whole narrative of God's inheritance is one unbroken chain of proof, that the human mind, when left to its own inclination in morals, invariably goes wrong, by following its passions rather than the judgment. Even where it is aided by revelation we see what little influence Divine laws have upon its sensual propensities, and with how great reluctance it yields to the government of reason. The Israelites had a body of statutes specially enacted by the heavenly Lawgiver, and communicated to them with extraordinary solemnity ; they had also a ritual established by the same authority, admirably adapted to promote their temporal ease and felicity : besides which they enjoyed promises of the Divine favour in this life and the next, on the condition of their obedience. But though their law was plain, and the religious services of the tabernacle were comfortable and edifying, such was the perverse disposition of this people, that, amidst the convincing evidences of miracle and prophecy, they chose darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. When, therefore, they forsook the right way, which was laid down for them by the word of God, it was but equitable that they should receive the fruit of their doings. The long-suffering which they had so grievously abused could not with justice endure for ever, because in that case it would have appeared as if the rule of righteousness had lost its sanction, and there was no difference between them that feared God and them that feared him not. That his justice, as well as mercy, might be made apparent not only then, but to future ages, the Almighty left his people to their own sinful will ; in

consequence of which they fell under the tyrannical dominion of those nations, by whose manners they had suffered themselves to be fascinated. Having abandoned the security which they enjoyed in the law of their God, they became exposed to all the miseries incidental upon a state of apostasy and corruption. In this sense it was truly said, that evil statutes and judgments were given to them, as these things were chosen by them in preference to the code of life, the possession of which raised them above all the families of the earth. The condition of Israel is that of all men to whom the Divine word is made known; for when that sacred blessing is perverted by them, it turns to their condemnation, and embitters the sufferings which inevitably result from wilful error and a vicious choice. The Author of our being has wisely united life and happiness with his own revealed institutes, while at the same time he has made misery and death the natural effects of sin and impenitence. If therefore men will persevere in such courses as are injurious to their own peace, they have no right to complain when the judgments which they have sought fall heavily upon them; nor can it be said with any truth, that their final separation from the fountain of life is cruel, when in every word, and by every action, they have continually said, "Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways." Job, xxi. 14.

In a state of trial and probation there must necessarily be a term to the period of mercy; otherwise all distinction between vice and virtue would be at an end, and there could be no allotment of rewards and punishments to men in another sphere of moral feeling, where the Divine justice and glory shall be made manifest to all orders of intelligent being. Impressed with this consideration, "let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; for if we sin wilfully after that we have received the know-

lege of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries." Heb. x. 23—26.

AUGUST THE SEVENTH.

THE REGENERATION.

Ezekiel, xxxvi. 25, 26.—*Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.*

HE who regards the Scriptures of the Old Testament in no other light than as the history of God's dealings with his chosen people, loses the benefit which the sacred lessons were intended to impart to all descriptions of men in every age of the world. Though much of these records is occupied in public transactions, the conflicts of nations, and the revolutions of empires, the Divine interposition is manifest throughout, and in such a way as to convey practical instruction to the meanest individual of society, let his circumstances be what they may, or however contracted may be his attainments. The Inspired Writings are justly called lively oracles, because they are of perpetual and universal importance; containing truths which affect every human heart, illustrated by examples to show the beauty of holiness and the deformity of sin. Whatever may be the relative interest of the several books, certain it is that no portion is trivial or obsolete; and the reader that so slighting any passage, wrongs the Spirit by whom it

was indited, and his own soul, which it was intended to edify. In the judgments which came upon ancient Israel we may discern the consequences of abusing the privileges and despising the warnings vouchsafed to us through the institutions of grace and the calls of Providence. The ingratitude of the chosen family is a picture of our own depravity, and the captivity into which they were carried aptly figures the slavery of corruption, and the effects of that licentiousness which is opposed to the salutary restraints of the Divine law. But though the Almighty suffered his people to follow their evil inclinations till the statutes and judgments which they admired, proved their ruin, mercy was mixed with justice, and the promise of restoration accompanied the stroke of chastisement. A great moral change, amounting to an entire national conversion and re-establishment, is foretold by Ezekiel; but though Judah was recovered, and never afterwards fell into idolatry, it is no less true that such an alteration as the one here described has never yet taken place; and that the posterity of Jacob, instead of being gathered by their Shepherd, have for many ages been scattered, without a name, among all nations. The prediction, therefore, is still future with respect to its full accomplishment, when the posterity of Jacob shall be miraculously collected by their Divine Shepherd, "who will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away; and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick." Much of this description applied to the personal ministry of the Redeemer in the day of his humiliation; but the whole will be truly verified when, according to the language of the prophet, which was adopted by our Lord as characteristic of his second advent, "he will judge between cattle and cattle, and between the rams and the goats." This regeneration of Israel is a picture of that change

which Divine grace operates upon the heart of every believer who is awakened to a sense of his sinful condition, and an abhorrence of those fatal errors by which his understanding has been long blinded. The means of bringing man home to his Maker, usually corresponds with that adopted for the recovery of God's ancient family, who were led into captivity and suffered great affliction, that they might be made conscious of their folly and deeply penitent for their transgressions. Thus in the valley of trouble stands the door of hope, through which the mortified spirit is enabled to pass into the region of light and liberty. So long as men live at their ease and in the enjoyment of all that can gratify their desires, they have no conception of spiritual want, or idea of their impoverished character as moral beings, who must become holy before they can stand with acceptance in the Divine presence. Temporal calamity is therefore used to convince the sinner of that great truth, and by humbling him in his own estimation make him sensible that the righteousness which is necessary to his salvation must be wrought out by a Divine power, and made effectual in him to the conversion of his mind by infinite grace. When he sees and laments his misery as an offender, that has sinned beyond all capacity of making satisfaction, he becomes a fit object of mercy, and is admitted to a believing view of that sacrifice which has been offered for the redemption of the world. The blood that was shed upon the cross, where "the righteous suffered for the unrighteous," is a stream of healing virtue, which takes away the malignity of sin from the penitent, and imparts to him the native principle by which, contrary to all his former connexions and habits, he lives in faith and continually aspires to perfection. His faculties are so disposed to holiness, that he seems to breathe a new atmosphere, and to have become another creature; for

though the natural genius remains as it was, and much of the original temper will continue, yet the one is directed to higher objects than formerly engaged its attention, and the other is controuled by the love of God which enables the believer to overcome the world.

AUGUST THE EIGHTH.

THE VISION OF DRY BONES.

Ezekiel, xxxvii. 3.—*And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord God, thou knowest.*

THIS famous vision has been strangely limited by most commentators to one particular object, which, however great and glorious it might be, was in fact but little in comparison to the grand and awful sense involved in the mystical representation. It has been supposed to mean no more than the revival of Judah from the graves of the captivity, and the restoration of that people to their own land. Such, no doubt, was the primary instruction conveyed to the mind of the prophet in this symbolical scene, and it must therefore have afforded abundant consolation both to him and the afflicted people among whom he ministered, and for whose benefit he received these extraordinary communications. The very appellation by which Ezekiel is here designated, shows that he was a typical character, and stood figuratively for that great Deliverer, "whose voice the dead shall hear; and they that hear shall live." John, v. 25. As the parabolical mode of teaching was always adapted to the national belief and to popular ideas, it is evident that the consolation imparted by the medium of this exhibition would have lost its effect if the people had

no conception of a general resurrection. So far from being comforted by the promise, they would have considered it as little better than a mockery of their destitute condition, and have replied, in the desponding language of the patriarch, "If a man die, shall he live again?" Job, xiv. 14. It is obvious, then, that this great article of faith was a primitive doctrine in the Jewish church, otherwise the prophets would never have applied so strange an illustration as a proof of the Divine power and verity. Here the exile was taught to rest in pious submission to the will of God, knowing that whatever might be his personal affliction, or however long the captivity should endure, the family to which he belonged stood secured by an immutable covenant. But the certainty of a recovery at some distant period would have yielded slender relief to his mind, if he had no prospect of any personal share in the deliverance, or was without the hope of enjoying the predicted salvation in another state. The view opened to the spiritual vision of Ezekiel, gave to him and his distressed countrymen the assurance, that as their political existence should be restored in due time by the immediate operation of the Almighty, so every member of the chosen family would be brought up again from the state of the dead. Nothing could be better calculated to support the spirits of the people in their calamity than such a representation, which was also necessary to keep them from falling into the errors of the heathen nations, among whom they were mingled. But that this vision had an object beyond the mere promise of gathering the Jews out of Babylon, is plain, from the declaration that the dry bones so miraculously raised, are said to be the whole house of Israel, which could not have been affirmed if the valley figured only that captivity when Ezekiel prophesied. Heavy as that visitation was, it did not deprive the people of their civil existence or religious privileges,

since we find that they still enjoyed their elders and princes, their priests and prophets. The kingdom of Judah was indeed subjugated, but not destroyed in the sense here expressed by a scene which denoted the utter loss of vitality, and even of the human form. The other branches of the chosen inheritance were, it is true, at that time scattered abroad upon the face of the earth, and totally despoiled of all political distinction. Yet neither of Israel nor of Judah could it be truly said, that they were reduced to an absolute state of dissolution, corresponding with the dismal picture of mortality here presented to the view of the prophet.

These awful remains of what was once active and great, were so separated and dry, that no judgment could determine their original relations, nor any art adjust them to each other. Such is the condition to which the whole posterity of Jacob must come before the word of God goes forth to call them from their graves. To all appearance their case will be hopeless, and the revival of such dry bones to any thing like the functions of humanity shall be pronounced impossible. It is, however, in this very forlorn and melancholy period, that the Divine power is made manifest in the accomplishment of his promise, to "bring his people up out of their sepulchres." Now, this resurrection must be yet future; for Israel has never been recovered; and Judah, though partially re-established, fell again under the tremendous chastisement of Heaven, and has for ages been in the state of the dead. But these dry bones shall hear the voice of the Son of Man, whom they once rejected; and when the Holy Spirit enters into them, the work of conversion will be so effectual that they shall stand upon their feet an innumerable multitude. The first sign of returning life is a great shaking, which aptly represents the agitation produced by every moral revolution, and the anxiety felt by those

who are brought under the conviction of sin and the sense of their errors. What is here described as characterizing a whole community, must take place also in the mind of every man who, being naturally dead in trespasses and sins, cannot stand upright till his faculties are restored, and a divine life is infused into him by the Spirit of God. The resurrection to glory must be preceded by the renewal of our hearts in this valley of vision; for unless the voice of the Son of God is made effectual in our obedience, whatever be our other attainments, we are destitute of spiritual life. If, then, we would be made partakers of that blessedness to which the prophetic scene directs our attention, let us wait diligently upon the means of grace, and submit with all humility to that Holy Teacher, who saith, "This is the will of Him that sent me, that every one which heareth the Son and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day." John, vi. 40.

AUGUST THE NINTH.

THE VISION OF WATERS.

Ezekiel, xlvii. 5.—Afterward he measured a thousand; and it was a river that I could not pass over: for the waters were risen, waters to swim in, a river that could not be passed over.

THE prophet having described the general restoration of his people to civil life and liberty, by a parabolical representation drawn from the doctrine of the resurrection, is presented with another vision, containing a lively assurance of their religious establishment. A temple is exhibited to his view, regularly constructed and fitly proportioned, according to the services of that which constituted the glory of Jeru-

saalem. But the splendid edifice here delineated is purely spiritual, for nothing like it has been framed in a material sense; and some things are mentioned as distinguishing it, which could not consist with any building made with hands. When the whole was completed, and the glory of Jehovah, corresponding with what the prophet beheld on the banks of Chebar, filled the house, a stream issued out from the threshold of the gate opposite to the altar. That was the natural direction which the waters of lustration would take after the offering of the sacrifice; and the whole had an allusion to the benefits produced by the redemption, shadowed under the form of the victim whose blood tinged the waters. In the symbolical language of Scripture the variety of nations is usually denominated waters; and though in this place a unity of profession is clearly intended, the common idea is at the same time preserved by the junction of many people in the same faith and worship. At first the cleansing fluid moved gently, and almost imperceptibly, along the floor of the mystic temple; but by the time the prophet had made a circuit of the building, the current ran rapidly; and when the heavenly interpreter completed the measurement of a thousand cubits, the waters were up to the ancles. This accurate notation of progressive increase, was expressive of the manner in which, under the Divine influence, the blessing represented should be diffused among the families of the earth. So quick and abundant was the accumulation, that on the measuring of another thousand the flood reached the knees; and at the final examination the whole was become an impassable river. Such was the regular advancement of that stream which issued from the altar of this prophetic edifice; and nothing, certainly, could be a more lively exhibition of the gradual spreading of the Gospel, till from its going forth at Jerusalem in a despised form it swelled into a mighty

mass, gathering, as it went on, "an innumerable multitude of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues." Rev. vii. 9. Till the sacrifice was completed, and all the ordinances of the law were fulfilled, the cleansing element was seen only within the precincts of the sanctuary; but before the canon of Inspiration was finished it had rolled over the surrounding lands, and imparted its salutary influence among the heathen, like a generous river which receives into its bosom the tributary streams, and communicates the means of life to all the regions through which it flows. The waters which the prophet beheld in this vision, had the same signification with the marvellous stream which copiously issued from the Redeemer's wounded side; for both were expiatory and efficacious only as being sanctified with the blood of the victim. When in the emblematic scene the waters that came out from the side of the altar were collected into a majestic flood, the whole face of nature was changed by its operation; a luxuriant vegetation enriched the countries which were once waste and wild, fruitful trees covered the banks of the river, and districts that were before the regions of darkness and death, became the seats of civilization and spiritual life. All this beautifully depicted the miraculous course of Christianity, and the beneficial alteration effected by the doctrine of the cross wherever it has come "in the demonstration of the Spirit and with the power of God." 1 Cor. ii. 4. The church, thus redeemed out of all lands, shall continue to increase till the second advent of her Saviour, whose Gospel of peace is the refreshing river, that maketh glad the city of God, in which all the members, however diversified by local institutions or speculative opinions, are joined in the profession of "one Lord, one faith, one baptism." Ephes. iv. 5.

AUGUST THE TENTH.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S DREAM.

Daniel, ii. 45.—*Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure.*

IT has been the ill fate of infidels to mix with their unbelief the most extravagant credulity, and while opposing revelation with vehemence on account of its difficulties, to involve themselves in contradictions. Thus at one time the same men have objected to the evidence from prophecy, as being insufficient on account of its obscurity; but when the application is too plain to be evaded, they maintain that the predictions were posterior to the events alleged to have been foretold. Determined at all hazards to get rid of the authority of the written Word, whose doctrines are no less mortifying to the pride of man's reason than its precepts are to his evil inclinations, these perverse disputers make no scruple of setting the fictions of romantic invention in competition with the Divine verity; and, as it was said by a pleasant monarch of one of the tribe, "they are willing to believe any thing except the Bible." Of this we have remarkable proofs, with respect to the Book of Daniel, whose history might have remained without controversy had it not been for the oracles therein contained; the exact fulfillment of which, in many circumstances, stamps the impress of sacred truth upon the entire volume, and confirms the confidence of our faith in the promises that are yet to be performed. It cannot be doubted that Daniel was of

the royal lineage, or that he resided in Babylon during the captivity which began with the vassalage of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, and lasted for the space of seventy years. The Jewish records fully establish these facts; and the admission of the narrative into the Hebrew canon, as completely verifies the authenticity of the prophecies connected with it. The history of Daniel, and his predictions, must go together; for they are identified in such a manner as to be indissoluble, unless it be supposed that the Jews could be so blinded as to fabricate writings in the name of this prophet, the object of which was to degrade themselves. But it is certain that this people, in their state of obduracy, have joined the sceptic in lowering the value of the Book of Daniel, not because they had any question of its antiquity or authority, but merely that they might elude the force of those parts which mark the coming of the Messiah. The history of the prophet, however, is so interwoven with that of his nation and their own admitted body of inspired writings, that his divine character can no more be contested than his existence. The first prediction of this illustrious person was the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. That haughty monarch was greatly troubled with the appearance of a wonderful image, whose parts consisted of various substances, the whole of which were separated and broken to pieces by the action of a stone cut out without hands. On waking from his disturbed sleep, the king of Babylon was greatly disquieted by what had been represented to his imagination, though all recollection of the particulars was gone from his mind. In this agitation he demanded of the wise men about him what no human understanding could perform, the relation of the dream and the explanation of its import. Furious at being denied what it was preposterous to ask, the tyrant ordered all the professors of science to be put

to death, which occasioned Daniel to solicit a respite, and in answer to his prayers he obtained from Heaven the knowledge of what Nebuchadnezzar required. The vision was a striking hieroglyphic of the four great monarchies, beginning with that of the Babylonian sovereign, who was distinguished as the head of gold. The breast and arms of silver figured the state which should succeed this formidable empire; and as the metal was one, but the power two-fold, so did this exactly comport with the junction of the Medes and Persians under Cyrus, who reduced Babylon, and formed another, but an inferior, dominion in its stead. The kingdom of brass, which followed that of silver, was the Macedonian, whose romantic chief, Alexander, arrogated the title of king of the world. But his progress, though resplendent, was short, and his successors in Syria and Egypt are fitly denominated the thighs of the image, which terminated in legs of iron, and the feet were partly of that metal and partly of clay. As the former composition very strikingly represented the dazzling but weak nature of Alexander's conquests; so nothing could more forcibly depict the fierce and extensive sway of the Roman republic than iron, which is used alike for the purposes of war and cultivation. This great military power destroyed all the vestiges of the former empires; but while the Romans subdued the barbarous nations, and in a great measure prepared them for civilization by the communication of laws, customs, and language, a distinction always remained between the victors and the vanquished. Beneath the Roman sceptre the gold, the silver, and the brass, or the different countries signified by those metals, were completely reduced, and their political consequence so entirely destroyed, that they were without any sign of their wonted grandeur. Now it is admitted on all hands that the Book of Daniel is of older date than the

establishment of the Roman empire; if, therefore, it has truly described the rise and fall of this vast state, the other prophecies contained in the oracle must be equally divine and certain. The quality of the fourth kingdom, which made up the emblematic statue, perfectly corresponds in all respects with the history of Rome, from its rude origin till it became the dominant ruler of the earth, and at length fell by the visitation of Heaven, so that no place was found of all its former greatness. These several monarchies, with their respective connexions, have been literally crumbled into dust, which the wind carrieth away and disperseth, so that there remaineth no remembrance of them under heaven; but "the stone cut out without hands (after effecting this miraculous revolution) became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth." This was that "stone of stumbling, and rock of offence," which was cut out of the mountain while the Roman empire was in all its glory; and by following the footsteps of its conquests, corrected their violence and converted them into a permanent and universal blessing. The remainder of this prophecy is yet to be fulfilled: for the stone laid in Zion is a sure foundation; and however slow may be the progress, yet the building formed upon it shall resist every opposition, and survive all the temporal dominions of the earth. The doctrine of the risen Saviour, like the stone rolled away from his sepulchre, brought life and immortality to light; and the influence of it will gradually spread and increase, to the subversion of all that darkens and enslaves the minds of men, till the appointed era, "when the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever." Rev. xi. 15.

AUGUST THE ELEVENTH.

THE THREE CONFESSORS.

Daniel, iii. 25.—*Lo, I see four men loose walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.*

THIS chapter abounds with instructive matter, and the narrative, in particular, exhibits the intolerance of error contrasted with the dutiful firmness of truth. The king of Babylon conceiving that the power which he possessed was the fruit of his own genius and energy, resolved that all his subjects should acknowledge his majesty, and pay him divine honours. For this purpose he caused an image of gold to be erected in an open space, towards which, at set times, and on hearing the sound of music, every person in his dominions was required to fall down and worship, on pain of being put to a cruel death. That this statue was the representation of the monarch who set it up, is obvious from the circumstance, that he did not offer any adoration to it in person, but only required it from others; and the arrogance which led him to this preposterous measure, appears in his own language on another occasion: "Is not this great Babylon, which I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?" A distinction is also made between this figure and the Babylonian deities, which plainly shows that the infatuated king was ambitious of being enrolled with the number of divinities worshipped in that extensive empire. Such pride, however extravagant it may seem, was not uncommon in the early ages, as appears from the vanity of Alexander, who claimed a celestial origin, and that of many of the Roman emperors, who demanded similar tokens

of reverence. But while we pity this weakness, the spring of the same folly may be found in ourselves; for what is that pride which leads so many to set up their opinions and devices as a rule of faith, or to make their contracted circle the boundary of truth, but a species of idolatry which has self for its object? The presumption and cruelty of Nebuchadnezzar, therefore, should teach us to examine our own principles and the temper of our minds, especially with regard to speculative opinions, about which men may differ without affecting the fundamentals of religion. But unmindful of the spirit inculcated by this benevolent system, there is an evil genius in most societies which perverts the understanding of men, and leads them to confine the privileges of Christian communion to the professors of some peculiar notions and customs. In this exclusive pale the inventions of men are commonly clothed with the pretended attributes of Divinity, to which the homage of an implicit faith is required, without the right of denial or the liberty of investigation. As truth is liberal, forbearing, and communicative; so error is passionate, vindictive, and despotic; issuing a decree for the government of the mind and the regulation of life, without producing any authority for the mandate or reason for the practice.

In the language and resolution of the Hebrew worthies we have a lesson easy to be comprehended and necessary to be exercised, "if we would possess a conscience void of offence towards God and towards man." Acts, xxiv. 16. When the king sent out his edict, enjoining all the inhabitants of his empire to fall down at stated periods and worship his image, the flexible moralist, so far from hesitating about the propriety of the order, would have considered only the danger of disobedience. "Nothing, certainly," would he say, "can be more absurd than this injunction to adore the work of human skill; but as in it I

recognize only the institution and representation of the sovereign, my external obedience is no more than a civil respect, which prudence teaches me to pay, rather than endanger my family and risk my own life." This is the usual reasoning by which men contrive to cheat their hearts and to impose upon their fellow-creatures, while, by the practice founded upon it, they contribute to the maintenance of error and the injury of mankind. But he who acts with a single view to the Divine inspection and the general utility, will be watchful over his words and deportment, lest in any instance he should mislead others, and do injury to the cause of truth, which is the glory of God. He knows, as well as others, that an idol is nothing, and that outward gestures are of little moment in the abstract; but if hereby encouragement is given to the pride of the vain and the folly of the vicious, he will avoid associations that are even apparently harmless, and fashions which may be otherwise indifferent. Like the pious Jews, who preferred death to the royal favour, which could be purchased only by a sinful compliance, the man who fears God will take the revealed word for his guide, and scrupulously adhere to its directions in every particular that concerns his belief and duty. He studies no casuistry where the precept is express, nor stops to inquire how he may best make a compromise between his conscience and his interest. In every difficulty he commits himself to the Divine protection; and having laboured to conform his mind to the law of righteousness, neither threats nor allurements can change his purpose while he depends upon that promise; "In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and he shall direct thy paths." Prov. iii. 6. Sensible that in life or in death he is in the immediate presence of his Saviour, who will sanctify every trouble, and preserve him in the midst of temptation; he goes on in his course, meek, yet determined, and ready to resign every

thing in this world for the sake of internal peace and future happiness. Whatever be his condition, it will be seen that he is supported by consolations, which no sensible objects can afford; and when he is in the furnace of tribulation, they who ascribe his principles will envy his tranquillity, and feel both as spectators and awe at the manifestation of grace which enables the poor to rise above the power of wealth, the feeble to resist the oppression of the mighty, and the ignorant to confound the subtlety of the wise. He who tempered the raging element, and walked with his confessors amidst the flames, will accompany the believer in every trial, and bear him up steadfastly under all the obloquy and fury of persecution; so that in the darkest scene, and most afflictive circumstances, he will say, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me." Ps. xxiii. 4.

AUGUST THE TWELFTH.

THE FALL OF NEBUCHADNEZZAR.

Daniel, iv. 37.—*Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise, and extol, and honour the King of heaven; all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment; and those that walk in pride, he is able to abase.*

THAT the king of Babylon should have fallen into so gross a delusion as to fancy himself entitled to divine honours, would almost seem incredible, if abundant facts did not prove that the human mind is susceptible of the most extravagant impressions, and ready to receive the incense of flattery, even when every feeling gives evidence of its falsehood. Pride

is so nearly allied to madness, that whenever men indulge the vanity of imagination in estimating their own character, they lose the right direction of their faculties, and degrade themselves in attempting to gain a distinction which does not belong to them. The history of Nebuchadnezzar is therefore a lesson of great importance, as it teaches the necessity of humility in every situation of life; since he that is not possessed of this virtue, has little security in his power, wealth, or sagacity, from the contempt of his fellow-creatures, who will not willingly submit to the arrogance which treats them as inferior beings. When Daniel explained the first dream of the monarch, it appears to have wrought a great change in his sentiments and behaviour, till the intoxication of conquest made him ambitious of higher honours than of right belonged to any mortal, however splendid in rank or glorious by his actions. He that censures the folly of this mighty sovereign, will do better by entering upon an examination of his own temper and deportment; where, probably, he will find, that, instead of making a proper use of the gifts of Providence, and ascribing all he has to the grace of God, it has been his wish and aim to gain admiration for qualities superior to other men. They who assume extraordinary merit on account of their mental acquirements or the success of their labours, are guilty of similar idolatry with that of the Babylonian king; for, like him, "they sacrifice unto their own net, and burn incense unto their own drag; because by them their portion is fat, and their meat plentiful." Hab. i. 16. Yet there are some particulars in the character of this potentate which place him in a very favourable point of view; for on every occasion, when his errors were made manifest, he endeavoured to atone for them by a candid and public confession, in which he acknowledged the supremacy of Jehovah in heaven and in earth. From his conduct after the

deliverance of the pious Jews, and his patronage of Daniel, we are warranted in considering this great king as a convert to the truth. Not that though he rose above the prejudices of education, he was not at once brought to an acquaintance with his own heart, and an abhorrence of its corruption. His second hieroglyphical dream was intended to produce this effect; for when he was at rest in his palace, he saw a tree strong and flourishing; its summit reached the clouds, and its branches overshadowed his vast dominions; it was laden with fruit, and luxuriant in foliage; the cattle reposed in its shade, the fowls of the air lodged in its branches, and multitudes partook of its delicious productions. While the king was contemplating this beautiful object, a celestial being, called a Watcher, and a Holy One, descended from heaven, and commanded that the tree should be hewn down, its branches lopped off, its fruit scattered, and nothing left of it but the stump of its roots in the earth. This dream, which none of the Magi could interpret, Daniel expounded with a troubled mind, but with the most scrupulous fidelity, showing that it portended a fearful calamity to the king, whom he advised to profit by the monition, in "breaking off his sins by righteousness, and his iniquities by showing mercy to the poor." Notwithstanding this extraordinary warning and honest counsel, Nebuchadnezzar suffered the whole to pass away without a due improvement; and at the end of twelve months, as he was walking in his palace, he said, "Is not this great Babylon, which I have built for the seat of my empire, by the might of my power and for the honour of my majesty?" No sooner had he uttered these haughty expressions than his glory departed from him, a supernatural voice announced the execution of the sentence which had been predicted in the dream, and the same hour the monarch was "driven from men, and he did eat grass as oxen, and his body

was wet with the dew of heaven ; till his hair was grown like eagle's feathers, and his nails like bird's claws." This melancholy disorder is described by ancient writers under the term of *lycanthropy*, being that species of madness in which the unhappy sufferer fancies himself a wolf, or some other beast of prey. Such was the deplorable condition to which the ruler of this vast empire was reduced as a punishment for his inordinate pride ; and in this wretched state of degradation he remained an exile from the communion of mankind during the period assigned by the councils of Heaven. At the end of the appointed days his reason returned, and the first use he made of it was to lift his eyes in humble gratitude to the Author of the merciful judgment with which he had been visited. That his repentance was sincere, is evident from the language of the record which he caused to be made of the whole transaction ; for, instead of burying this portion of his life in oblivion, as most men would have done, the king published the narrative, without any concealment or extenuation, addressed to " all people, nations, and languages, in his vast dominion," concluding with this pious confession, " Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise, and extol, and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth and his ways judgment ; and those that walk in pride he is able to abase."

From this remarkable story we learn, that the only safe course to be pursued in prosperity, is, to keep the passions under subjection, to be watchful over our hearts, and to pray continually, lest we enter into temptation ; but should the reverse of this befall us for our ingratitude and folly, let us imitate the Babylonian monarch, and lift up our eyes in penitence to the Most High, " whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and whose kingdom is from generation to generation."

AUGUST THE THIRTEENTH.

THE DEATH OF BELSHAZZAR.

Daniel, v. 23.—*The God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified.*

WHEN Nebuchadnezzar, from the roof of his palace, took a survey of the splendid city which gave a name to his vast dominion, the magnificence of the spectacle elated him to such a degree, that he ascribed all the glory of the scene to his own happy genius and indefatigable exertions. The degradation of this mighty monarch from the rank of humanity to a bestial condition, was an indication of the fall of his capital and the entire reduction of his empire. His son, Evil Merodach, reigned only two years, being succeeded by Belshazzar, in whose time the Medes and Persians, under the command of Cyrus, laid siege to Babylon, though with little prospect of success, on account of its lofty walls and immense resources, by which the place was not only secured from assault, but provided with the means of subsistence for many years. Such, indeed, was the confidence of the sovereign and his corrupt court, that nothing but gaiety and debauchery prevailed in the palace, while the rest of the inhabitants continually beheld from the ramparts numerous encampments of various nations, all combined against this proud mistress of the eastern world. It was at this period that the prophet Daniel, who now led a retired life, obtained those Divine communications, which set forth the character and succession of the four great monarchies, agreeable to what had been exhibited in other imagery to the puissant king of Babylon. The preparation for the first change was laid by Nebuchadnezzar himself, in his extensive

conquests and prodigious accession of territory, which brought into his capital an inundation of wealth and luxury. His grandson, Belshazzar, treated the danger by which he was menaced with so much indifference and contempt, that while Cyrus was patiently labouring upon the means to get possession of the city, by diverting the course of the river Euphrates out of its ancient bed, the infatuated monarch wasted his hours in riot and debauchery. On the very night when the Persians made themselves masters of the place, they found the inhabitants engaged in celebrating a yearly festival with dancing, drinking, and reveling; and so it had been predicted by Jeremiah: "In their heart I will make their feasts, and I will make them drunken, that they may rejoice, and sleep a perpetual sleep, and not wake, saith the Lord; and I will make drunk her princes and her wise men, her captains and her rulers, and her mighty men; and they shall sleep a perpetual sleep, and not wake, saith the King, whose name is the Lord of hosts." Jer. li. 39. 57. In the midst of this scene the king, whose doom was sealed, mingled impiety with his extravagance, by causing the holy vessels, which had belonged to the sanctuary at Jerusalem, to be brought into his presence, and profaned by libations to the national idols. But while Belshazzar and his wives, concubines, and princes, were indulging themselves with this sacrilegious jollity, a supernatural appearance in the dome above them dashed the cup of pleasure from their lips, and filled their hearts with fear and horror. All the guests beheld with equal amazement the hand, as it were, of a man tracing with deliberate care certain unknown characters upon the wall, over against the throne. None of the Magi could venture to read the mysterious writing; the news of which being quickly spread through the palace, reached the ears of Nitocris, the queen-dowager, who entered the banquetting-house, and in-

formed her son that there was a man in his city capable of interpreting the words, and of expounding the oracle. The language of this illustrious woman shows that the preaching of Daniel had not been lost in the court of Babylon, though the reigning sovereign was forgetful of what had befallen his predecessor. The good queen, we find, would not grace the irreligious assembly with her presence, till the intelligence of the wonderful apparition, and the general alarm which it had occasioned, induced her to render what assistance she could to the perturbed mind of Belshazzar, by letting him know where he could obtain counsel in this perplexity. That the queen was a woman of genuine piety, may be inferred, not only from her absence at such a festival, but from the character which she gave of the prophet, whom she designated as one who was under the immediate influence of Heaven, and actuated by an excellent spirit. What this exalted convert said of the accomplished and inspired minister was made good by his deportment when brought into the royal pavilion; where he, in the first place, rejected with modest firmness the proffered rewards of the affrighted king, whom he seriously reproved for not having profited by the remarkable visitation which had brought his grandfather to "know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and that he appointeth over it whomsoever he will." The prophet, then, laid before Belshazzar the iniquity of his whole reign, and the particular enormity of opposing the Lord of heaven, by prostituting the sacred vessels to the honour of senseless idols. Having thus preached "righteousness and temperance," he proceeded to denounce the judgment to come, in an explanation of the oracular symbols, which signified the dissolution of the kingdom, the death of the monarch himself, and the transfer of all his dominions to the Medes and Persians. Every part of

the exposition was fulfilled that very night ; for before the meeting could break up, or each of the party take steps for his own personal safety, the invaders entered the city, penetrated into the palace, and slew the king in the midst of his guards. " Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty ; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints." Rev. xv. 3.

AUGUST THE FOURTEENTH.

THE DELIVERANCE OF DANIEL.

Daniel, vi. 27.—*He delivereth and rescueth, and he worketh signs and wonders in heaven and in earth, who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lions.*

SUCH was the pious confession of a great monarch, after having been the dupe of a wicked plot, and witnessed the power of God in overturning the evil machinations of the conspirators. The virtues of Daniel, and his extraordinary qualifications, recommended him to the notice of Darius, who, on settling the dominion which he had just acquired, judiciously appointed this virtuous minister to the highest station in the court of presidency over Babylon. He was led to this measure, no doubt, from the information which he had received of the wonderful portent that announced his conquest ; and it is probable that this account made him inquisitive about the history of Nebuchadnezzar, and his preternatural visitations. These inquiries would naturally excite admiration of the man by whom the oracular manifestations were explained ; and an acquaintance with him must have produced an esteem for his unaffected modesty, fidelity, and piety. But the merit which raised Daniel

in the estimation of his lord, moved the envy and hatred of the courtiers, and particularly of those who were associated with him in the government of the kingdom. They beheld his advancement with the jealousy of little minds, and dreaded his further elevation on account of his inflexible integrity. That these compeers of Daniel in the administration, were princes of Babylon, seems plain from their knowledge of his religious principles, and the artifice which they adopted to effect his ruin, grounded upon the presumption that their master, being ignorant of the faith of his favourite, would the more readily accede to the flattering, but fraudulent, project which they had devised. These deceivers drew up a decree, that no person in the empire should dare to offer prayer or petition of any kind, for the space of thirty days, but to the king only. Though such an interdict may appear very extravagant, it was well calculated to impose upon a prince, who must naturally be suspicious of the sincerity of his new subjects, and therefore was the more easily persuaded to adopt a measure, the avowed object of which was to bring the loyalty of all his people to a certain test. In this insidious proposal the king saw nothing but a zealous regard for his honour, and the security of his government; for the cunning statesmen who contrived the edict, had taken care to make it seem a necessary provision for the unity of the empire. Had Darius viewed it in any other light, it is not likely that he would have given it his sanction, especially when by so doing he put it out of his power to save those who might, through inadvertence or from conscientious motives, become liable to the punishment enacted against offenders. This shows how cautious men ought to be, lest by an irrevocable engagement they enter into concerns which may be injurious to their peace of mind; and the whole narrative affords valuable lessons of instruction for the conduct of life

in every station ; teaching those in authority to exercise their power with circumspection ; and their inferiors to take the Divine law for their guide, without ostentation in prosperity, or servile fear in the time of persecution. Though Daniel was apprized of what had taken place, he neither remonstrated with the king, nor endeavoured to avenge himself of his adversaries ; for as the decree was confirmed, and enrolled according to the ancient laws of the kingdom, he chose rather to leave the decision of his cause in the hands of God, than to incur the risk of a revolution, by attempting to procure his release. He would not, by a temporizing policy, strive to elude the vigilance of those who watched for his fall, that they might be furnished with matter of accusation to accomplish his destruction. The court of worldly splendour would have been too ready to find a way as to bring the decree into execution ; but this pious man felt the weight of the law, and the custom of worshiping the true God, and would give occasion of thanksgiving to his God, and not an evil example to his brethren. He was placed in a public post, and his religion being generally known throughout Babylon, if, in compliance to the letter of the edict, he had neglected his devotions, the people would have thought that his faith was destitute of a foundation, or that his piety was nothing more than affectation. There was no room for compromise, in this instance, between interest and conscience ; and Daniel was too wise and too good to study any arts of concealment, by which the truth might be injured by his timidity, or the servants of God drawn aside from their duty by his evasion. The prophet, therefore, continued to pursue his usual course, which soon gave the confederates an opportunity of reporting his violation of the precept to the king, who saw, when it was too late, the

artful wickedness of the whole design. But the law being fixed, and the proofs certain, nothing remained for the sovereign and his faithful minister, but a compliance with the dreadful sentence, which doomed the accused to be thrown to the lions. When this execution had passed, and the royal signet was set upon the door of the den, the enemies of Daniel rejoiced in the success of their scheme, judging, beyond all doubt, that his distress was sure; for, having no sense of magic or the occult powers, they were without any idea of the divine protection or apprehension which might be his. But while they revolved in their minds the loss of the king lamented his loss, Daniel, though chained by the power of God, who kept him secure and safe in the cavern of death.

When, therefore, Darius hastened to the den, he might see what a just cause he had for his speedy confidence in the power of God, who preserved the life of the king, fastened upon the rock of his fidelity, and going early to the den, he certainly exhibits his character in a new point of view; and his subsequent conversion, and the condign punishment upon those who had so foully abused his favour, proves that the devotional spirit, and miraculous deliverance of the prophet, were productive of an effectual conversion. Besides the practical instruction which we derive from this history for the regulation of our conduct, it contributes to the establishment of our faith, by exhibiting Daniel as a lively type of the Messiah, whom he so clearly foretold and minutely described. As the accusers of this great man could find no other occasion against him but what concerned his religion; so the persecutors of Jesus, being disappointed in their malicious inquiries, were driven to the necessity of fixing the charge of blasphemy upon him; and as the envious courtiers pressed

Darius with the immutability of his decree, so the Sanhedrim urged their demand upon Pilate, with this menace, "If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend." Daniel, in the den, figured the Messiah in the interval between his crucifixion and resurrection; for as the one was kept safe from the ravenous animals, so the other, by his Divine power, stopped the lions' mouth; and notwithstanding the precaution of sealing the sepulchre, He, like his faithful servant of old, arose with glory from the state of the dead, covering his murderers with shame and confusion; "So let all thine enemies perish, O Lord; but let them that love him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might." Judges, v. 31.

AUGUST THE FIFTEENTH.

THE SEVENTY WEEKS.

Daniel, ix. 24.—*Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people, and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy.*

So explicit is this declaration, that the opponents of all revelation have laboured hard to destroy its Divine authority, while the ancient enemies of Christianity have foully endeavoured to vitiate the record, that they might avoid its application. But the pride of the one party, and the malignity of the other, have served to establish the evidence beyond all doubt, by bringing the whole question under repeated and rigid examination; the result of which has been the accurate notation of the period, and the precise determination of the circumstances, to which alone the

prophecy can possibly be referred. That the weeks here mentioned are to be understood not of days but years, is agreed on all hands ; therefore four hundred and ninety annual revolutions must be counted from some certain era for the completion of what is here described concerning the people for whom Daniel prayed, and their city, which was then in ruins. The point to be ascertained is the commencement of this enumeration ; for it is observable that the reckoning was not to take place from the day when the information was given, but from the going forth of the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem. Now, as there were four mandates issued in favour of the Jewish captives, it is necessary to consider which of them was the one here intended. The first was that of Cyrus : but his decree was not effectual to the immediate benefit of the objects of it, though undoubtedly it proved the basis of that which was passed in the reign of Darius Hystaspes, in the year five hundred and fifty before Christ. This edict, however, as well as the former, was confined to the re-edifying of the temple ; whereas, the commandment which constitutes the angelical epoch, extends to the renewal of the entire capital, together with its holy place : and a grant to this effect was actually passed in the seventh year of Artaxerxes Longimanus, who married Esther, and restored the Jewish constitution, both civil and ecclesiastical, without any restrictions. The fourth and last decree to this effect, came from the same generous monarch thirteen years after the former ; but as it was nothing more than a recapitulation and confirmation of what had before been commanded, it cannot with propriety be called a new edict. By virtue of the imperial decree, sent forth in favour of the captives after their miraculous deliverance from the destruction laid for them by their inveterate enemy, they rose into political consequence under the two pious leaders, Ezra and Nehemiah.

But the going forth of the commandment mentioned by the archangel, denotes something more than the mere signing and sealing of a formal writing, and clearly expresses the act of the Almighty directing and over-ruling men as the instruments of his gracious purpose. No incident in the history of this remarkable people, after the revelation here made to Daniel, so exactly comports with the nature of the message and the language of the archangel, as that astonishing circumstance, when an obscure damsel was raised to the Persian throne, for the salvation of her devoted people. In that memorable event we have a lively picture of the blessings here described, as flowing from the sacrifice destined to "finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness." Then the commandment did go forth efficaciously in the liberation of the chosen seed, by the manifest interposition of Heaven; and it was followed by a royal edict establishing them in their civil rights, and restoring the temple, with its solemn services. The seventh year of Artaxerxes fell in the four hundred and fifty-seventh year before Christ; consequently the reckoning of seventy prophetic weeks from thence, brings us to the exact season when Messiah, the Prince, was cut off according to the oracular assertion of the high priest, "that it was expedient one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not." John, xi. 50. This number of seventy weeks is said to be determined upon the Jewish community and its religious institution, by which must be understood a limited duration to both: and according to the prediction so was the fact; for the Messiah being cut off, this people had no longer a prince, and were speedily without either a city, a sacrifice, or an oblation. In the prayer of Daniel we may observe that he requests, on the behalf of the desolate sanctuary, that

it may be again visited with the Divine presence; to which the celestial messenger evidently alludes in the promise that the Most Holy should be anointed towards the expiration of the allotted period. The Holy of Holies, which was a term familiar to the Jews, and understood by them of the most venerated or interior part of their sanctuary, is here applied directly to the Messiah. It was the established belief, grounded upon Scriptural authority, that the presence of Jehovah was peculiarly manifest in the holy place; the archangel, therefore, tells the prophet that this fulness of the Deity shall be at the time appointed, not in the material temple made with hands, but in the person of the Most Holy, or Messiah the Prince. Both the regal and sacerdotal characters were of old imparted by unction; and as the Jewish high priest, in particular, was so consecrated, that he might offer sacrifices for the expiation of sin, therefore the Divine Person here spoken of is said to be anointed for the same purpose, that he might make an "atonement for iniquity, and bring in everlasting righteousness." Now it is obvious to all who believe the Scriptures to be the word of God, that this prophecy must have been fulfilled in every one of its parts, or that the blessings here foretold are yet to come. That the seventy weeks have passed away is proved from this fact, that the existence of the Jewish polity, with the city and temple of Jerusalem, is determined or limited within that period; but the holy place has been destroyed for ages; and though the site of this ancient capital remains, it is in the hands of strangers; and the people for whom Daniel supplicated, have long been scattered over the face of the earth without a government which they can call their own, and incapable of offering either sacrifice or oblation, according to the laws and usages of their fathers. Thus are we then compelled to look back to some definite era, when this illustrious oracle

received its accomplishment; and here happily we shall be at no loss, or under any uncertainty, if the angelical information is seriously compared with all the particulars of the Jewish history, down to the termination of that state by the Romans. The scattered descendants of Jacob's family ought to be frequently impressed with the momentous truths contained in this awful decree, and, in the language of an apostle, "Let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus, whom their fathers crucified, both Lord and Christ" Acts, ii. 36.

AUGUST THE SIXTEENTH.

THE END OF PROPHECY.

Daniel, xii. 9, 10.—*The words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end. Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried; but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand.*

THIS answer of the archangel, to the importunate question of Daniel concerning the termination of the wonders which had been emblematically exhibited to him, teaches us the proper use of the mystic Scriptures, particularly with regard to those predictions which remain to be fulfilled. So far from discouraging the reading of these recondite writings, the language of the celestial interpreter, in unison with what occurs in other parts of the Sacred Books, announces a blessing upon those who shall diligently contemplate these holy oracles. It is indeed laid down as one of the signs by which the predicted events shall be known, that in the latter days, when the most stupendous revolutions are about to take place, they

who figure the most conspicuously in them will be scoffers of the truth, and wilfully ignorant of the prophecies. The agents most concerned in verifying these Divine declarations, are not void of intellect, though they are said to want understanding. On the contrary, they have sagacity enough in things of natural science, and are indefatigably industrious in opposing the cause of righteousness. If we examine the predictions which have been fulfilled, and compare them minutely with the correspondent pages of history, we shall find that the enemies of religion have contributed effectually to its evidence, while they persecuted its votaries and endeavoured to undermine its authority. Thus, in particular, when the Messiah appeared at the time appointed, with all the characteristics previously defined, such was the wayward malignity of infidelity, that the obdurate rulers pursued the very course which terminated in the literal accomplishment of these prophecies, wherein he was described as being cut off by a judicial sentence, executed according to an ignominious form, different from any punishment in use with the Jews. Now, at this very period there was a general expectation of the anointed One, not only among the people who were the depositaries of the sacred oracles, but the surrounding nations; which hope must have been founded upon some prophecy, fixing the blessing of deliverance within certain limits. What the era was we have already seen, and upon that declaration alone could the confidence have been built, by which so many were induced to "look for the consolation of Israel," since there was no other chronological mark to ascertain precisely the season when the Redeemer should be revealed than this, that seventy weeks were determined to "expiate sin, to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness." Notwithstanding this, when that day dawned upon those who were in possession

of the promises, such was the general pride and insensibility, that because the Saviour came meek and lowly, without the pomp of war and the parade of worldly grandeur, they hid their faces from him, and proceeded to the extreme of impiety, by denying their God and King, when, to obtain their murderous wish, they vociferated, "We have no Lord but Caesar." This was no more than what had been repeatedly predicted "at sundry times and in divers manners by the prophets;" yet the rulers, and the nation at large, who were guilty of this apostasy, still adhered tenaciously to their religious profession, and affected great reverence for the inspired Writings, while they were acting against the Divine law, and realizing all that the holy men of old, under the direction of the Spirit, had left upon record as descriptive of the latter days of the Jewish commonwealth. In like manner we are assured that the second advent of the Messiah shall be distinguished by the prevalence of infidelity, and a laxity of principle almost universal, in the midst of God's judgments and the visible accomplishment of his prophecies. The archangel, in reply to the inquiry of Daniel, says, that "though many shall be purified and made white," yet this will be done in the way of trial, which he immediately afterwards explains, by delineating the disposition and conduct of their opponents, who "will do wickedly;" that is, they shall set themselves against the righteous, and labour with malicious zeal to counteract the cause of truth. What was here made known to the prophet, as characteristic of his countrymen in the time of their first visitation before the extinction of their temporal institute, was literally fulfilled in the spirit and behaviour of that generation of men who beheld the miracles of our Lord, and wondered; who heard his doctrines, and admired his eloquence; yet with all this splendour of evidence and power of conviction,

they shut their eyes and hardened their hearts, agreeable to what had been long before foretold, "Hear ye, indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not." Is. vi. 9. But though the representation here made to the prophet Daniel was primarily verified in the persons who brought on the destruction of the Jewish polity, it reaches also to the time of the end, and will be found to fit with the utmost exactness the age in which the hidden mysteries will be evolved that shall usher in the Lord of Glory. It is his own declaration, that "because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold" (Matt. xxiv. 12); which paints concisely, but forcibly, the same scene as that sketched by the archangel, and shows that the depravity of manners will weaken the influence of truth, and that amidst the pride of knowledge and the thirst of discovery, the love of God will be little regarded, and the contents of his revelation treated with indifference. In such a state of things the Sacred Records will not be understood by those who yield to the general corruption; not that they are deficient in capacity, but because they want the will and inclination to study and profit by them to advantage; so that, with respect to their judgment and improvement, these writings are no better than a sealed book. But it is added, that "the wise shall understand;" by whom are meant not the keen and penetrating, the profoundly learned and inquisitive spirits usually designated by that appellation, but they who seek for wisdom with a humble and teachable mind in these oracles, as containing the words of eternal life, and who turn all the information derived from thence to their own edification and the benefit of the sphere in which they move; thus bringing upon themselves that blessing, "They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever."

AUGUST THE SEVENTEENTH.

THE REDEMPTION OF ISRAEL.

Hosea, iii. 5.—*Afterward shall the children of Israel return and seek the Lord their God, and David their king; and shall fear the Lord, and his goodness, in the latter days.*

THIS prophet discharged his high office in four successive reigns, and for the long space of seventy years. Unlike the other inspired writers, who mix with their predictive descriptions of the chosen people much that relates to the history of other nations, Hosea confines himself generally to the posterity of Jacob. He notices, indeed, the conversion of the Gentiles, and he has ~~oken~~ ^{drawn} ~~power~~ ^{drawn} allusions to some of the mysteries of redemption, ~~consideration~~ ^{consideration} to the calling of our Lord from Egypt, the resurrection on the third day, and the final triumph of the Messiah and his people over death and hell. But even these subjects are touched briefly and sparingly, though, from the manner in which they are introduced, and the obscurity spread over other parts of this ancient book, the whole prophecy may justly be considered as covering, in the representation of Israel and Judah, a view of God's dealings with his church, till the consummation of all things. To this symbolical sense we are led by the very remarkable, and, as it should seem, perplexing circumstance, related of the prophet himself, and of his marriage with an incontinent woman. It has been matter of much discussion, whether this was a real or only a visionary transaction; but in either case it was clearly emblematical, and as such, each of the parties in this extraordinary union must be considered. The woman figured the Hebrew nation, and her immorality be-

fore marriage, agreed to the depraved state of Jacob's family at the time of their visitation in Egypt, and their being betrothed by a solemn contract as the spouse of Jehovah. The wife of the prophet, after bringing him a son, relapsed into her former courses; and the offspring of this promiscuous commerce constitute a distinguished portion of this history. That the three children were typical characters, is evident from their names; the first being called Jezrael, or "the seed of God;" and the others, Lo-rubamah, or "unbeloved," and Lo-ammi, which literally means, "not my people." The legitimate son represented the true servants of God belonging to all the twelve tribes, and who in the times of the greatest degeneracy worshipped the everlasting God in the hope of the Redeemer to come. These were a holy seed; the genuine sons of the Most High; begotten of him to a *Amratzope*, and the early seed of that church earnestly at last embrace all the families of the earth. These are Jezrael, typified by the prophet's own son and rightful heir, as the children of God and heirs of the promises. The first issue of the adulterous connexion which the woman formed was a female, and the wickedness of her sex aptly figured the enfeebled condition of Israel, after the separation of the ten tribes from the house of David, till they were utterly cut off and scattered upon the face of the earth. But the last was a son, born after the weaning of his sister, which is a circumstance of considerable moment to the right understanding of this mystic scene. As the child, when deprived of its mother's milk, depends for its support upon foreign aliment and natural strength; so the ten tribes, in their exile, were left without the nurture of the Divine truth and the ordinances of religion. They have been mingled with the rest of mankind, and are destitute of any better guide in moral action or hope of future happiness than what

is afforded by mere natural reason, the imperfect light of tradition, and the aid of human philosophy. The sex of the child born after the expulsion of the former, denotes the strength and vigour remaining in the other branch of the Jewish family, very different from the weakened state of the discarded kingdom previous to its fall. Nor have the two tribes ever suffered so total a dereliction. The ten were absolutely lost to the world soon after their captivity. They have been no where to be found for many ages, and know not where to find themselves; though we are assured they will be found again of God, in the day when he shall make up his jewels. But the people of Judah have never ceased totally to exist. In their captivity at Babylon they lived a separate race, respected by their conquerors. From that captivity they returned. They became an opulent and powerful state, formidable at times to the rival powers of Syria and Egypt; and held in no small consideration by the Roman people, and the first emperors of that mighty power. Even in their present state of ruin and degradation, without territory and without a polity of their own, such is the masculine strength of suffering with which they are endued, they are still extant in the world, as a separate race, but not as God's people, otherwise than as they are reserved for signal mercy. "The adulterous wife, taken again under the protection of her husband, yet without being restored to the conjugal privileges, is a lively picture of the Jewish people, kept by Divine Providence in all the vicissitudes of fortune, but not made partakers of the Gospel liberty, till the season of trial shall be completed. As the offending female was made to tarry in a state of seclusion many days; so God's ancient inheritance must remain under a cloud, and be divided from the rest of the world till the appointed time, when, the veil being taken from their minds, they will return and seek Jehovah their

God, and submit to the Messiah, or David their king*."

The restriction of the Jews from idolatrous principles and practice, is thus expressed in the oracle, "They shall be without king, and without ruler, and without sacrifice, and without statue, and without ephod and teraphim." It is a striking feature in the history of this wonderful people, that in all their changes and troubles since the last captivity, they have never been seduced to paganism or Moham-medanism. If they have hitherto resisted the evidence of the Gospel with obstinacy, it is creditable to their firmness that they have also withstood the delusions of imposture and the arts of corruption. Such has been their sincerity in temptation, and fortitude under persecution, that while we pity their blindness we cannot withhold from them the tribute of admiration, which will stimulate us to labour earnestly for their conversion, and to pray for the hastening of that "day when there shall be one fold and one Shepherd." John, x. 16. Too many pious Christians have narrowed the prophecies which affirm the restoration of Israel, by confining them to the period of our Lord's first advent; and in so doing they have unintentionally obscured some of the most sublime portions of revelation, dishonoured the Divine attributes, and given a harshness to the scheme of redemption totally contrary to its fundamental plan, and subversive of its benevolent objects. The whole tenour of the Sacred Writings exhibits a far different system, and one more consistent with the ideas of infinite wisdom and boundless love in the Creator of the universe, who also is the Redeemer of man. The declarations of prophecy agree with the evidence of history, and they explain the cause and design of that appearance

which is so unaccountable to the philosophical sceptic, the subsistence of the Hebrew nation, as an insulated people, amidst the revolutions of empires, the fluctuations of opinions, and the ever-varying fashions of mankind. That they are so preserved, when all outward circumstances combine to alienate them from a troublesome and despised profession, is a fact which, while it calls for the serious consideration of every man, ought to impress the believer with sentiments of gratitude and charity, knowing that "there is no essential difference between the Jew and the Greek; for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him." Rom. x. 12.

AUGUST THE EIGHTEENTH.

VICTORY OVER DEATH.

Hosea, xiii. 14.—*I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction.*

THE primary meaning of this passage is that of deliverance from captivity, and the restoration of civil life and liberty, which had, as it were, been lost, by an act of suicide, agreeable to the prophetic complaint, "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself, but in me is thine help." If, however, the revival of the afflicted people from their state of political death, be the immediate object of the promise, and that to which the hopes of the faithful and the penitent are here directed, the Divine apostrophe goes beyond the mere idea of temporal mercy and the destruction of tyrannical power. From the Apostle's citation of this sublime epincium in his argumentative discourse on the future life, it is plain that he understood the

whole prophecy as descriptive of man's condition by the fall, and of his recovery through the death and resurrection of Christ. This spiritual construction of the oracle is so far from being at variance with the literal application, that it is in fact the proper use to be made of the whole ; for as we are assured, on the authority of inspiration, that all the recorded transactions of Israel were typical events, the predictions relating to the same nation must also be considered as having a reference to the church of which that community was an emblem. The language in which the triumphant prediction is couched, and the awful imagery adopted, afford still farther proofs that something more grand and terrible is here intended than the simple rescue of men from the yoke of earthly bondage, and the pouring out of vengeance upon their cruel oppressors. Verbally rendered, the denunciation and its context will run thus : " The children are in the opening ; from the power of Hell I will redeem them. From Death I will recover them. Death, I will be thy pestilence ! Hell, I will be thy burning plague !" This personification of two objects the most fearful and yet the most interesting to every serious mind, is a full indication of the ancient belief in a separate state of consciousness after the extinction of animal life, and the prophetic threatening as clearly points to some determinate period for the manifestation of the Divine glory and the salvation of man. The word here translated, Hell, signifies in the original the general habitation of departed souls, and by no means is to be taken in that too common sense of the place of punishment. But even the English term, in its primitive acceptation, is free from this limited and tremendous sense, denoting nothing more than invisibility, or a place that is hidden from human observation, and impossible to be discovered by the senses. The Hebrew word, and its correspondent

one in the New Testament, conveys no other idea than that of the receptacle of disembodied spirits ; and to this agrees the article of the Apostles' creed, where we profess it to be our belief that " the soul of Christ descended into hell."

Now the unknown region so denominated, was neither the state of supreme felicity nor the place of torment ; for to the seat of bliss our Lord did not ascend till he carried his body thither, and yet he assured the penitent thief on the cross, that on the very day of suffering he should be with him in paradise. This state of rest and enjoyment, then, to which the soul of the converted malefactor was carried, was the identical hell, or the place where Christ spent the intermediate time between his death and resurrection. Here he proclaimed redemption, and made known the triumph of the Cross to those who had died, from the beginning of the world, in faith and repentance. Death and Hell are personified together ; both are represented as the enslavers of man, and therefore both are threatened with destruction from the presence of the Most High. On this account it may be said, that if by the former we are to understand a state of security and preparatory bliss, it cannot without violence be called the enemy of man. But such an objection can be of no weight ; for as death itself was not the state to which the Author of nature ordained man, so the condition that succeeds it is different from what would have been his portion had he preserved his integrity. Hence it is that there is something repulsive in the one and awful in the other, even to the firmest minds, which would not have been the case if the original constitution of our frame had rendered this change in the mode of being necessary to its improvement. But the Sacred Oracles inform us, that the evils allied to mortality were accidental, and resulted from the irregularity of man in choosing

to follow the impulse of his appetite and the suggestions of an artful tempter, rather than confine himself within the bounds of obedience to his Maker's will. In aspiring to a superior rank, contrary to the tenure by which he held what he enjoyed, man fell under the dominion of death. But when the sentence was denounced against the offenders, it was accompanied with a promise, that "the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head." What was enigmatically expressed when the transgression came, is here uttered in a strain of exultation by the Saviour himself, who, alluding to the venomous poison of sin, which gave a temporary advantage to the adversary, says, that he will be to him also a plague, sore, and pestilence. But the destruction of the evil one, properly so called, as the source of all mischief, could be of no comfort to man without the remedy of his disease, and a restoration of that life which was lost by his disloyalty. Death, and the state to which it leads, is the consequence of sin, let the manner of the dissolution be what it may. If the souls of men were left without the means of advancement in knowledge, and the attainment of a higher degree of happiness, the consciousness of existence would be a perpetual torment. Yet such is the situation in which all are placed, and from which nothing short of Infinite Power and a perfect righteousness could possibly raise us to be meet associates with those orders of intelligence who have never deviated from the law of their nature. It is evident then that the destruction of death, in every form, is essential to the felicity of those who are kept by it from the possession of everlasting life, and which consists in the fruition of His favour "whose presence is fullness of joy, and at whose right-hand are pleasures for evermore." Ps. xvi. 11.

This is the great end of the conflict here anticipated by the prophetic description, in which the Mighty

Victor assures to his people as complete a redemption from mortality, and all the defects connected with it, as if no separation had ever taken place between the human soul and the fountain of its existence. All must alike yield to the judgment which made the extinction of animal life the necessary effect of sin; but in the death and resurrection of Christ, every believer sees the ransom for his own deliverance from the temporary dominion of the grave. He can therefore adopt the language of the Apostle when about to meet the king of terrors, and say, "The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law." But thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Cor. xv. 56, 57.

AUGUST THE NINETEENTH.

THE CLEANSING OF BLOOD.

Joel, iii 21.—*For I will cleanse their blood that I have not cleansed; for the Lord dwelleth in Zion.*

THE prophecies of Joel were probably delivered about the same period with those of Hosea, but with a remarkable difference in the style of composition; that of the latter being sententious, abrupt, and obscure, while the former is distinguished by copiousness and perspicuity, animated description and pathetic application. In the first chapter, and part of the second, the prophet denounceth the Divine judgments upon the land by the visitation of two enemies equally dreadful in their progress and the effects of their invasion. No language can exceed, if indeed it be possible for any to equal the sublime, but terrible, picture here given of the locusts, whose ravages are so destructive, that "a fire devoureth before them,

and behind them a flame burneth : the land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness." This agrees with exact minuteness to the fearful change produced by these formidable insects wherever they come, which is always in such numbers and compact order as to baffle all resistance and to darken the very atmosphere. What they do not devour is scorched and rendered black by their touch, so that the trees which they have stripped appear as if scathed by lightning, and the country that becomes the scene of their devastations is quickly made a frightful desert, though it was just before flourishing in verdure like the garden of the Lord. That famine follows this fearful judgment is no more than what might be expected from such voracious creatures, who consume as they pass the industry of years, and never leave a spot till they have completely laid it waste. Such are the ministers of vengeance threatened to be sent against impenitent Judah; but even these destructive armies, with their attendant evils, are trifling compared to the horrors of which they are the precursors and emblems. The abuse of the Divine mercies very commonly brings on a calamitous deprivation of them; and this change of condition, if it be not duly improved by an alteration of manners, as usually leads to still heavier and more extensive evils. Thus the plague of locusts which infested Judea proved a certain sign to the people that the other predictions would be certainly verified, and that with out a timely repentance more terrible enemies than these were at hand in the persons of the Chaldeans, who should finish the work of ruin by sweeping the land and removing its inhabitants. But the prophecy goes still farther, and describes the revolutions which shall take place in the great day of the Lord, comprehending the whole space of time from his first to his second advent. Great part of what is here said of the locusts and those whom they

primarily figured, cannot be understood in a literal sense of the one or the other, and must therefore have a future and more enlarged application. To the character of the Romans and their extensive conquests this picture agrees in every respect; and that the prediction naturally reaches to that period when the Jewish polity was ended by them, is apparent from the direct application of part of this very prophecy to the day of Pentecost by the Apostle. Surrounded by men well acquainted with the Scriptures, and particularly attentive to the oracles that concerned the fate of their nation, St. Peter would never have applied the promise contained in the Book of Joel to the miraculous effusion of the Spirit, if the prophecy had been considered as fulfilled. His citation of the passage, which foretells an uncommon increase of Divine knowledge by the outpouring of the gift of inspiration upon all descriptions of persons, shows, that whatever may be the inchoate accomplishment of Joel's predictions, the entire completion of them will not take place till the day of the great harvest, "when Judah shall dwell for ever, and Jerusalem from generation to generation." This gathering has never yet been witnessed; for though the two tribes did return from captivity, and enjoyed peace and prosperity for some years, yet the tranquil season was followed by a series of troubles, till the whole state became a Roman province, and was afterwards utterly extinguished, according to what was here foretold; "The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood." These splendid images are used to represent the civil and ecclesiastical institutions belonging to the chosen people, and specially imparted to them from heaven. But the one was obliterated, and the other lost its lustre, when the infatuated nation rejected their Saviour, and brought down "his blood, with horrid imprecations, upon the heads of themselves and upon their children." Yet we find the rulers of the same

people complaining of the Apostles, that by their preaching they filled Jerusalem with the doctrine of Jesus, whose blood was charged upon the Sanhedrim that had condemned him. They were, it seems, highly offended at being thought guilty of injustice in persecuting the innocent to death; and this very declaration was an admission, that if they had no ground of accusation against our Lord, his murder was a national crime, and consequently that his blood lay upon all who either actually condemned him, or who participated in the offence by rejecting him as the Messiah. The time, however, is coming when his Divine authority shall be acknowledged, even by those who have hitherto denied him; and when his blood, instead of lying upon them for judgment, shall be turned into a stream of healing virtue, cleansing them from all impurity, and “purging away iniquity from Jacob;” for as “Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many, so unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time, without sin unto salvation.” Heb. ix. 28.

AUGUST THE TWENTIETH.

THE TABERNACLE RESTORED.

Amos, ix. 11.—*In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old.*

THOUGH Amos was not educated in the schools of the prophets, nor bred in the manners of polished life, his style is energetic and beautiful, rich in description and sublime in sentiment. Much of his imagery is drawn from rural occupations and the various scenes of nature, which is accounted for by

his employment of keeping cattle and the place of his residence, which was on the borders of the wilderness. He was cotemporary with Hosea, and like him Amos prophesied chiefly concerning Israel, whose captivities and excision he foretold by the sign of an eclipse of the sun in the midst of a solemn festival. But though he denounces the Divine judgments against the chosen people for their luxury and oppression, idolatry and injustice, he intermingles threatenings against other nations, and closes his predictions with a promise of recovery to the house of Jacob. The dispersion of the twelve tribes is represented by an emblem perfectly suitable to the circumstances of those who are the objects of comparison, but so unlikely to occur, that nothing short of the unerring Spirit could have described their condition with such exactness several ages before it actually took place. "Lo," saith the Lord by his servant, "I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve; yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth." As sowing, in prophetic language, denotes the providential distribution of a people for the purpose of making them useful or subservient to some gracious end in the advancement of the church; so sifting, in the sense here expressed, signifies separation and bare existence, without settlement or increase. Exactly in this manner have the posterity of Jacob been sifted or dispersed over all lands, but taking root in none; and mixed with various nations, yet still considered as strangers and foreigners in the earth. So remarkable a preservation as this, and so minutely foretold at the time when the nation was in its full vigour, and in possession of its ancient habitation, must have been with some special design; and what this is we learn from the prophetic declaration, where Jehovah saith, "In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the

breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it up as in the days of old." Here, then, it is evident that all the previous visitations and the general dispersion have a reference to some determinate period, emphatically called "that day," which, with the equivalent phrase of "those days," is common in the Scriptures, and particularly in the prophecies. This certain time, so strongly expressed and clearly defined, is the same with what our Lord calls his day, and it takes in the whole space from the incarnation of the Messiah to the consummation of his church. The Jewish commentators themselves have always understood the term in this sense, as comprehending the age to come, or the times of the Messiah; and in allusion to this very passage of Amos, they call the national deliverer "the son of the fallen;" that is, of the tabernacle. According to this prediction, therefore, the royal house of David was to be in ruins at the advent of the promised Saviour; and to the same effect another prophet has described him as the shoot of a withered tree standing in a neglected vale. To such a desolate state the kingdom of David was in reality reduced, when the study of the Sacred Oracles induced many to look for the consolation of Israel. But in what manner are the breaches of the shattered structure closed up, and with what materials are the walls of it to be repaired?

The illustration here symbolized under the form of a vast edifice, dismantled and scarcely presenting a vestige of its former glory, is not merely to be replaced by some new plantation, but to recover its original form, and to equal its pristine strength and splendour. Now, as in the restoration of old buildings much additional matter will be required, though the ancient boundary and plan may be adhered to; so in the establishment of this kingdom a supply of other subjects is necessary to fill up the place of

those who were lost. The objects here elected to repair the breaches of the tabernacle, and to raise its walls to their proper height, or, in other words, to complete the scheme of redemption, are pointed out in language which cannot be misunderstood or perverted. The calling of the Gentiles, and the establishment of them upon the sure foundation laid in Zion, is thus declared: "I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it, as in former days; so that the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen who are called by my name, may possess me, the Jehovah." This prophecy, as the Apostle James informed the first Christian Council, was verified, when, by the ministry of his brother Peter, "God did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name." Acts, xv. 14. But the tabernacle, whose breaches began then to be repaired, shall continue to receive an accession of members and strength under the influence of the Divine Spirit, till the time appointed for the general conversion of Israel, when the head-stone, which has so long been to them a rock of offence, will be brought forth with shoutings, in which they shall join, crying, "Grace, grace unto it." Zech. iv. 7.

AUGUST THE TWENTY-FIRST.

SALVATION IN ZION.

Obadiah, 21.—*And Saviours shall come up on Mount Zion to judge the Mount of Esau; and the kingdom shall be the Lord's.*

AT what time this prophet ministered cannot be determined; but where positive information is wanting, speculative conjecture has been busy; and some critics, both Christians and Jews, have fancied that

the inspired writer of this book was the same with the pious steward of Ahab's household. As this opinion, however, is grounded on no other basis than the similarity of name, it is obviously of too slender a texture to claim respect; nor can the exact age of the prophecy be ascertained by other circumstances, though the place it occupies in the Sacred Canon is sufficient to fix its high antiquity and Divine authority. Thus much, indeed, may be concluded with certainty, that the oracle was imparted after the invasion of Judæa by a formidable power, with whom the Edomites treacherously combined and participated in the spoliation of Jerusalem. The prophecy speaks of the captivity as an event that had already occurred; and according to his description, the triumph of Esau's descendants over their brethren was distinguished by brutal violence and unnatural insolence; for which the Almighty threatens these enemies of his afflicted people with heavy judgments, as the just punishment of their impious craft and rapacious cruelty. From this internal evidence, compared with history, it is reasonably supposed that the prophecy of Obadiah was delivered for the comfort of the Jewish nation in their bondage under Nebuchadnezzar, and about the same period that Jeremiah and Ezekiel uttered similar denunciations against Edom for its base conduct towards the distressed children of Jacob. What was thus foretold, literally took place when the Babylonians possessed themselves of the mountainous part of Arabia, inhabited by those tribes who never afterwards recovered their independence, and were expelled for ever from their native land. But if the judicial sentence upon Edom had its accomplishment when the scourge of the earth became the instrument of Divine vengeance, there is a sense in which the decree must be understood as having a relation to times and objects yet to come. The

promise of restoration to the Jews is couched in terms which, after making every allowance for the loftiness of the prophetic language, has never yet been fulfilled, since it cannot be affirmed of the house of Jacob, that it has been a fire for the destruction of its adversaries. If the posterity of Esau fell under a foreign yoke, it was by other means than the family of Israel; and at no time did Zion obtain that vast dominion which is predicted in this place, much less did it enjoy any such power after the return from the captivity; which blessing, however great, was far from bringing to Judah an increase of territory. Of the Jewish wars, indeed, we read much, but of the conquests made by this people we know little, and at no period was their capital, like that of Chaldaea or other great states, the seat of an extensive empire. Still there is a sense in which of Zion it may be said, that it has sent forth a universal law, and that the throne fixed upon the sacred mount is immutable. In the symbolical language of the predictive Scriptures, Eden, or Idumea, denotes all that is inimical to the church, of which the seed of Jacob and their polity must be considered as the uniform emblem; therefore the mount of Esau, as contrasted with the hill of Zion, represents that opposition which is set by the powers of this world against the government of the Messiah. But the violence and machinations of these unprincipled confederates, instead of hindering the progress of truth, will be made subservient to its final establishment, and every weapon formed to destroy the Redeemer's kingdom shall be instrumental to its propagation. The prophecy, in the first place, clearly points to the utter ruin of all the enemies of God's people; but it also as plainly contains an assurance of mercy in the conversion of the Gentiles, and their submission to the righteousness of Jehovah. The deliverance wrought out in Zion, and the Saviours,

who are described as taking their seats upon the holy mount, represent the same grace in two different stages; the one expressing the act of redemption, and the other noting the manner of its promulgation. The plural form of speech marks the persons engaged in this Divine work, and is explained by the parallel passage of the royal prophet, which relates to the same subject; "Yet have I set my King upon my holy hill of Zion, I will declare the decree: Jehovah hath said unto me, Thou art my Son, this day I have begotten thee. Ask of me, and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." Ps. ii. 6, 8.

AUGUST THE TWENTY-SECOND.

THE HISTORY OF JONAH.

Jonah, iv. 10, 11.—*Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither made it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: and should I not spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than six score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?*

THE name of this prophet, which signifies a dove, was probably allusive to the character sustained by him as the bearer of the Divine message to an idolatrous people, and more particularly as the representative of Him, who in the fullness of time came to save sinners by his death and resurrection. Jonah flourished at an earlier period than any of those writers among whom he is classed: and as both he and his father were of distinguished eminence in the tribe of Zabulon, they furnished a complete refuta-

tion of the proverb, that "out of Galilee arose no prophet." John, vii. 52. At first sight it would seem as if this book belonged rather to the historical than the predictive Scriptures; but upon a careful examination we shall find that its place in the Sacred Canon has been wisely determined, since in the narrative of an extraordinary mission to the inhabitants of a Gentile city is figured the work of universal redemption, wrought out by the Saviour, "the testimony of whom is the spirit of prophecy." Rev. xix. 10.

That Jonah was actuated by national prejudices when he endeavoured to avoid the appointment to which he was called, is evident from his language and his conduct. Regarding himself as the prophet of Israel only, he seems to have thought it unreasonable to preach repentance among those who were excluded from the covenant of promise. In withdrawing to Joppa, that he might be released from a disagreeable injunction, this refractory servant evinced a disposition similar to that of the Apostle, who some ages afterwards accounted it unlawful to have any communion with the Gentiles, till he was taught, by a voice from heaven, to regard nothing as unclean, which God had purified. Divine wisdom in each case condescended to give a supernatural sign, that in all generations to come men might learn to acknowledge the righteousness of Him who "maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." Matt. v. 45. When it is said that the prophet fled from the presence of the Lord, we are not to understand it as expressing the preposterous idea of his being able to elude the observation of that Infinite Intelligence which penetrates all space, and detects the latent movements of the human heart, under every guise of studied concealment. Jonah was too well instructed in the principles of truth to indulge any notion so derogatory

tory to the perfection of the Deity ; but he might think, that, by departing from the spot where he had been accustomed to receive the visitations of the Holy Spirit, he should be free of a burthen which oppressed his feelings. This belief, that the Divine presence, in the way of vision or audible communication, was peculiar to some particular places, obtained, not only among the superstitious of the heathen world, but with the people to whom were imparted the oracles of God. The want of clarity in Jonah was equally reprehensible with the weakness of his faith, and therefore the instrument chosen to punish him was well adapted to enlarge his sentiments, and to excite his compassion for the sufferings of others. Inquiries into the physical questions connected with this miracle might possibly be amusing, but as they would be of little practical benefit, the discussion must give way to the more important matter of evangelical illustration. The history says, that the creature chosen to correct the madness of the prophet was prepared for the purpose ; and though we are not to conclude from hence that it was a new species, we may justly suppose it to have been endowed with faculties fitted for the occasion in which it was employed. Three days and three nights was the disobedient messenger confined in this horrible cavity, which he fitly compared to that invisible state where the souls of the departed are kept in awful gloom. Yet in this dreadful condition the prophet did not abandon all hope of deliverance ; on the contrary, in a strain of uncommon fervour he professed his reliance upon the Divine mercy, and his assurance of an interest in the salvation of Jehovah. That Jonah, plunged in the depth of the abyss, should have indulged the expectation of being restored to the light of day and the temple of his God, can be ascribed to nothing short of the support derived from the Holy Spirit, by whose guidance he

poured out this plaintive address, which was expressive of his own state and a prophecy of the Redeemer.

In opening the jaws of destruction, and bringing forth the captive safe from his wonderful prison, an emblem was exhibited of that scene, which above eight hundred years afterwards appalled the Roman guard when the angel of the Lord rolled back the stone from the door of the sepulchre, and sat upon it; "his countenance being like lightning, and his raiment white as snow." Matt. xxviii. 2. To this interpretation of the typical prophecy the Jewish people were no strangers; for it had been plainly maintained by the great Preacher of Righteousness himself, in reply to the scribes and pharisees, when they demanded of him a sign from Heaven as the evidence of his Divine authority. Instead of complying with their request, which he knew was made with an insidious view, he referred them to this recorded deliverance, as the intended sign of what should be accomplished in the presence of that unbelieving generation, whom the men of Nineveh would condemn because they repented at the preaching of Jonas, and "Behold," said he, "a greater than Jonas is here." Matt. xii. 41. From this exposition we learn that all the transactions related in the history, though literally performed, yet had a symbolical tendency. The confinement of the prophet in the bosom of the deep represented the death and burial of Jesus, who after manifesting himself to the spirits in safe keeping, arose again from the tomb, and sent his disciples with the gospel of peace to all nations. The penitence of the king of Nineveh and his subjects was not more surprising than the rapid change effected among the heathen by the preaching of the apostles; while the discontented prophet and his withered gourd represented with equal force and exactness the unwillingness of even

the believing Jews to part with their ceremonial system, which was of limited use, and confined in its duration to the night of the law.

As Jonah prized the plant which sheltered him, more than the welfare of the vast city that was extended to his view; so the immediate followers of the Redeemer adhered for a long time to the notion, that the object of his mission was merely to restore the glory of Israel, without any concern for the other families of the earth. This judaizing spirit prevailed with such obstinacy in the early church, that miracles and revelation were found necessary to inculcate the liberal principle, "that in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith, which worketh by love." Gal. v. 6.

AUGUST THE TWENTY-THIRD.

BIRTH-PLACE OF THE MESSIAH.

Micah, v. 2.—*But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah! though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.*

THE style of this prophet resembles in many respects that of his contemporary Isaiah, like whom he inveighs against the national sins with vehemence, describes the divine judgments in glowing colours, and yet combines with these severe denunciations the most gracious promises of mercy and prosperity. Having foretold the desolation of the land by the conquest of the Chaldeans, he proceeds to comfort the people with an assurance that Zion shall flourish when her enemies and oppressors are utterly destroyed. As a sign that the word of truth will have its full ac-

complement, a particular place is selected and addressed by name to stand for an evidence of the destined glory, both with respect to the period and manner of appearance. The low and despised Bethlehem Ephratah, to distinguish it from another town of that name in Zabulon, is pointed unto as the spot where all the lines of ancient prophecy shall meet in the nativity of Him whose "goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." That no mistake may arise concerning the fulfilment of this prediction, it is expressly said, that the event shall occur while Judah subsists as a political state, and when Bethlehem Ephratah is one of the least of its cities. Notwithstanding its primitive rank, as appertaining to the family of David, and the distinction which will confer upon it perpetual renown, this place at the time appointed is to be without municipal authority or a military leader. Such, according to the oracle, shall be the reduced circumstances of this Bethlehem when the Messiah comes forth to perform the eternal decree for the salvation of man. The word by which his manifestation is expressed literally signifies the act of coming into the world, and it ought therefore to have been so rendered in this place, as indicating the birth of the Redeemer, who unites in himself the human and the divine natures. In this sense the ancient Jews uniformly considered the prophecy, and as such the Sanhedrim applied it when Herod and all Jerusalem were troubled, or in consternation, on account of the extraordinary embassy of the eastern Magi. The chief priests and scribes had then no difficulty in answering the question proposed to them concerning the place where the Messiah was to be born, and they were without any inducements to pervert and misapply what they found written in the sacred books on this subject of general expectation. The very inquiry was a proof of the popular belief in these writings, and that they were regarded as laying down

certain marks by which the advent of the Messiah should be accurately determined. In reply to the demand of the jealous prince, the sacerdotal college referred the monarch without hesitation to this passage of Micah ; and thus directed, the first converts of the Gentile world visited Bethlehem, where they did homage to the infant King. The massacre which followed seems to have been indicated in the tender apostrophe addressed by the Almighty to the afflicted city ; for it is observable, that while the inhabitants are comforted with a promise that the Ruler of Israel shall be born among them, the declaration is coupled with one of a distressing nature, implying depopulation and oppression. That sanguinary act, by which so many women became childless, is fitly represented as making Bethlehem the least among the thousands of Judah, because hereby it was deprived of the flower of its strength. But the oracle goes still farther into the effects of his incarnation : “ Whose ways have been from of old, even from the everlasting ages ;” and describes him as rejected by Judah, for which that people are given up, “ until the time that she which travaileth hath brought forth ; and then the remnant shall return unto the children of Israel.” Thus the separation of the tribes is not only declared in express terms, but the consummation of the church in the accession of the Gentiles is made the necessary preparation to the restoration of Jacob’s family, and to the final union of them under the dominion of one Lord, and in the profession of the same faith ; “ for of him, and through him, and to him, are all things : to whom be glory for ever. Amen.” Rom. xi. 36.

AUGUST THE TWENTY-FOURTH.

THE DIVINE ATTRIBUTES.

Nahum, i. 3.—*The Lord is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked; the Lord hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet.*

WHEN the apostle of the Gentiles, rapt in ecstasy, had a vision of the heavenly regions, he “heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for man to utter.” 2 Cor. xii. 4. From this high authority we learn that the economy of the celestial world cannot be comprehended by the human mind in its present state, and that the language there in use is far beyond our capacities. Divine truth, therefore, to be understood by us, must take a form and an expression level to our rude and narrow perceptions; for, accustomed as we are to material objects, the idea of abstract excellence can neither be perfectly conceived nor intelligibly communicated. Our faculties, indeed, might have been more enlarged, if Infinite Wisdom had not for gracious purposes limited their powers and operations to a particular sphere of probationary service. But, thus constituted, all the notions which we can possibly form of invisible realities will necessarily be confused, while the most sublime expressions of them will fall short of the sentiments we feel, and of the glory which we admire. Even revelation itself embodies spiritual things, and describes the most august by imagery drawn from the grandest appearances in nature. The Almighty is represented as both pleased and grieved, bearing long with the provocations of his creatures, and displaying at last the fullness of his resentment against them for their wickedness. We read also of actions attributed to the Deity which would seem to determine his locality, a connection

with visible objects, and real motion from place to place. The clouds are called his chariot, and the heavens his throne, from whence he surveys all that is done upon the earth. Though he fills the immensity of space with his presence, and penetrates all causes to their remotest effects, so that nothing is contingent to Him who made and governs the universe, yet he is said to dwell with the meek and obedient, while those who resist his will are the objects of his vengeance.

The exordium to the prophecy of Nahum is remarkable for this boldness of personification, and the tremendous view which it gives of the Omnipotent: "God is jealous, and Jehovah revengeth; Jehovah revengeth and is furious; Jehovah will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for his enemies; Jehovah is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked; Jehovah hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet." It has been too much the fashion to regard this mode of speech as purely rhetorical, and the legitimate hyperbolism of oriental poetry; but in so judging of the sacred writings great injustice is done to what constitutes a fixed and perpetual rule of faith and practice. If these sublime representations are to be understood in no higher light than that of an accommodation to human infirmity, or as a style of composition peculiar to one age and people, no small portion of the Hebrew Scriptures will be reduced to the level of other ancient remains, and consequently the edifying purposes they were intended to answer will be lost. But the language of prophecy is of more extensive import than the narrow spirit of criticism is disposed to allow; and this is proved by the occasional applications of it in the preaching of Him who said, "Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me." John, v. 39.

Now as we have already seen that the mission of Jonah was not only a real transaction, but typical of other persons and events; this book of Nahum, which was indited by the Holy Spirit near a century after the former, must on the same principle be considered as involving a double sense; for if Nineveh was symbolical in the one case, it is equally so in the other. The capital of the Assyrian empire was no doubt dealt with as the inspired writers have declared: but the first visitation figured the calling of the Gentiles after the resurrection of the Messiah, "to whom all the prophets give witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins." Acts, x. 43. With this interpretation, then, which is established by the highest authority, that of our Lord himself, we can have no difficulty in understanding the scope of the descriptive poem before us to be the declaration of general redemption through the righteousness of the incarnate Word, who in his exalted as well as his humbled state, "hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm." As the repentance of Nineveh prefigured the conversion of the Gentiles, and the formation of the church, the denunciations consequent upon the Divine appearance indicate the signs and the judgments connected with the second advent of the Messiah. In the government of this divine Saviour and Almighty King there is so much forbearance with moral evil, and such an apparent slowness in the evolution of his decrees, that while the patience of the saints is exercised by the delay, the profane take occasion to blaspheme and scoff, saying, "Where is the promise of his coming?" 2 Pet. iii. 4. But, as in the days of his personal ministry upon earth he commanded the winds and walked upon the waves, so he is still present amidst all the dark and boisterous scenes of the world, tempering and making all things work for good to them that love God. Rom. viii. 28. This is the stay

and comfort of the believer, that the Author of his salvation is eternal and omnipotent, ever watchful over his people, and stedfast in the execution of his plan of grace, though the moral elements are in confusion, and mankind seem in general to be loosened from all restraint. The same Jehovah who led Israel through the sea, tabernacled in the flesh, and in his mediatorial character he is continually increasing his kingdom by rendering his sacrifice efficacious to the souls of those for whom it was offered. As in former ages the malice of the wicked only served to promote the Divine glory in the benefit of his people; so will it be till the consummation of his church, against which the gates of hell shall not prevail; for “Thus saith the Lord, which maketh a way in the sea, and a path in the mighty waters; which bringeth forth the chariot and horse, the army and the power; They shall lie down together, they shall not rise; they are extinct, they are quenched as fire.” Isa. xlii. 16, 17.

AUGUST THE TWENTY-FIFTH.

THE DIVINE SUPPORT.

Habakkuk, iii. 17, 18.—*Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vine, the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat, the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.*

It is the peculiar excellence of the holy Scriptures, and an unquestionable proof of their divine origin, that they are ever new, abounding with beauties obvious to every eye, and affording counsels for all the circumstances and conditions of mankind. While

the fascinating charm of mortal genius is weakened by familiarity, and the most elaborate productions of human wisdom lose the power of pleasing, the living oracles retain their influence over the heart, and present fresh attractions on every perusal. No change of fashions or opinions, no improvements in science, or refinements of language, can affect the authority of those immutable principles, which will be felt wherever they are known, and revered the more they are studied. Even the gay voluptuary and the arrogant sceptic are constrained to respect the sentiments, and to admire the diction, of these sacred writings, though the one is too much the slave of his passions to be guided by the precepts which they impart, and the other is too proud to admit their sacred character as the revelation of God. Now there must be some secret power which thus compels men of adverse minds to pay homage to these venerable records to the condemnation of their own practice, and the mortification of their vain pretensions. What this is may be easily discovered by considering that the volume of inspiration lays open the cause of all misery, and reveals the only means of securing happiness in a world subject to perpetual fluctuations. Thus the trifling and the serious, the haughty and the humble, feel an interest in what is here disclosed, though, as their characters differ, the operations produced by the testimony of truth will vary also according to the spirit with which it is studied, and the regard that is paid to what it imparts. The curious inquirer is merely entertained by that which excites the gratitude and strengthens the faith of the believer ; and where the man of lively imagination is enraptured with sublimity of thought and elegance of composition, the pious but unlearned reader derives comfort in trouble and counsel in difficulty. This benefit can only be obtained by applying to the holy records with the same desire and diligence which we manifest in the

investigation of writings that affect our temporal welfare, and the advantage of our families. When we examine the Scriptures as the words of eternal life, every sentence will be found replete with momentous consequence, as connected with the principles of faith or the duties of morality. The prophecy of Habakkuk, which appears to be limited in its objects, and to relate only to the punishment of the Jewish people by the Chaldæans, is of more extensive import, and contains representations of universal concern. The infliction of judgment upon a sinful nation by the ministry of a formidable power, is, no doubt, the immediate subject; but the prophet on his watch-tower pleading with the Almighty, and anxiously waiting for an answer to his prayer, figured the church in her state of longing expectation for the promised redemption. The abounding of iniquity is a melancholy spectacle, upon which moralists may declaim and philosophers reason, without effecting any salutary change, or rendering even a probable solution; but this divine colloquy informs us, that sin is the source of all wretchedness, out of which man can only be saved by infinite grace. It is this salvation upon which Jehovah the Holy One here communicates his will, commanding his servant to "write the vision and make it plain, that he may run who readeth it." This injunction is explained by the ancient custom of engraving public documents on durable materials, and suspending them in places of general resort, that all who were interested in them might have full opportunity of becoming acquainted with their contents. What the prophet beheld, and of which he was required to give a minute description, was at that time very remote; yet were all men even then called upon to put their trust in the Divine Person whose coming was determined from the everlasting ages. Such is the preparation for the wonderful appearance of the Redeemer; but what follows is so weakened in our

ordinary versions of the Bible, as to throw a cloud of obscurity around the glorious Person to whom all our attention should be directed. In the original all other objects are lost and overpowered by the divinity of the speaker, who thus proclaims his approach: "The vision is yet for a determinate period, but at the end he shall break forth and not disappoint: though he tarry, wait for him, because he will surely come, he will not go over the time appointed. Behold, the soul of the proud is lifted in him; but the just shall live by his faith." According to this view, the advent of an illustrious Person is predicted, whose visit will be an offence to some and an eternal blessing to others. The high-minded have no disposition to receive this merciful Being because what he makes known is repugnant to their prejudices; but the just, who having a due sense of their own imperfections, feel the want of righteousness to render them acceptable in the Divine presence, and embrace the offer of salvation, shall, by believing, enjoy eternal life. "This is the vision extended to the mind of the prophet; and the Saviour, who breaketh forth as the hope of his people, is afterwards described as the same who led their fathers through the wilderness, delivered them the law from Sinai, and established them in the promised land. In the prospect of his second manifestation to "review his work in the midst of the years," or to accomplish the engagement of his holy covenant, the inspired Messenger, on the behalf of the redeemed church and every one of its faithful members, breathes out this ardent address: "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vine; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."

AUGUST THE TWENTY-SIXTH.

A RENEWED PEOPLE.

Zephaniah, iii. 20.—At that time will I bring you again, even in the time that I gather you; for I will make you a name and a praise among all people of the earth. When I turn back your captivity before your eyes, saith the Lord.

This prophet was the contemporary of Habakkuk and Jeremiah, foretold, like them, the desolation of Judah by the Chaldeans; but though Zephaniah described the sacking of Jerusalem with graphical accuracy, and predicted the extinction of Nineveh with remarkable precision, it is evident that these events were only the partial accomplishment of what was revealed in this inspired book. Many things were denounced which did not happen during the Babylonian captivity, nor in any other part of the Jewish people, before their final dispersion among the heathens. Now as the gathering of the Jews to a converted state, and the entire destruction of their inveterate enemies, constitute distinct portions of the prophecy, it is obvious that, whatever era we fix the commencement, the whole is progressive, and the termination yet to come. Jehovah is introduced issuing his decree of excision against all the inhabitants of the land; which sentence was carried into effect, to the extent here represented, only at that period when the temple was so completely destroyed that not one stone was left upon another, and the Jews were scattered over the face of the earth; since which it may be truly said of them, that they have neither had a settled place, which they can call their own, nor been incorporated by them-

selves or with any other nation. The whole period of this judgment and separation is called by the prophet, "the great day of Jehovah," because it comprehends the space of time between the first and second advent of the Messiah, "who will smite all the gods of the earth, and men shall worship him; every one from his place, even all the isles of the heathen." This overthrow of idolatry, and the universal acknowledgement of one Lord and Saviour, sufficiently determines the sense of the prophecy, and shows that it is to be gradually verified, "till the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ." Rev. xi. 15.

The rejection of this gracious Sovereign, as the minister of righteousness, is plainly declared to be the cause of all the evil that falls upon the seed of Jacob; but notwithstanding their rebellion, the same merciful Lord announces his second manifestation, and calls upon the people to prepare for his approach, with the promise of ample grace and forgiveness. "In that day shalt thou not be ashamed for all thy doings, wherein thou hast transgressed against me: for then I will take away out of the midst of thee them that rejoice in thy pride; and thou shalt no more be haughty because of my holy mountain. I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord." All that is contained in this prophetic scene is still future, for to no generation, of which we have any memorial, does the representation suitably apply; but what follows is still more decisive as to the distant accomplishment of the prediction. "The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth; for they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid." At no period since the delivery of this prophecy can the characteristics here specified be discovered in the

spirit and conduct of the Jewish people ; but, in truth, what is thus affirmed of them is put by way of contrast, and to show the efficacy of the change that shall be wrought in them on their submission to the Messiah's government. They will then become thoroughly a new nation, both in heart and in life, in their public profession and private deportment. Such indeed are the blessed effects produced in and upon all who are called by Divine grace to the knowledge of the truth, and who feel the power of it upon their consciences, in the renovation of their minds. What was noted by the council concerning the Apostles, " that they had been with Jesus," will be observed also by the world, of all his sincere followers, in whom the example of their Master will shine forth with so much lustre as to render the " name by which they are called a praise among all people." It is the glorious property of the Gospel to change the tempers and deportment of believers, so that they who were before proud and vindictive, become, under its influence, mild and liberal ; firm in the cause of truth, but charitable towards all who differ from them in sentiment. While the disciples of the suffering Redeemer lament their continued imperfections, they are earnestly aspiring after holiness, and seeking to have that wrought fully in them which the Apostle states as forming the Christian life : " Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself even as his Lord is pure, who was manifested to take away our sins ; and in him is no sin. Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin, for his seed remaineth in him ; and he cannot sin because he is born of God." 1 John, iii. 3—9.

AUGUST THE TWENTY-SEVENTH.

THE SECOND TEMPLE.

Haggai, ii. 7.—*I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts.*

WE are told by Ezra, that when the foundation of the second temple was laid, after the restoration of the Jewish captives, by the decree of Cyrus, there was a strange mixture of feelings among the spectators, the young being filled with joy at the prospect of an edifice for the solemn services of religion; while their elders, who remembered the glory of the former structure, wept, on comparing the meanness of the one with the magnificence of the other. At this period the Almighty sent the prophet Haggai with a message of comfort to the people, assuring them, that whatever they might think of the building which was about to be erected, it should far exceed that of Solomon. “I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come; and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts.”

There were five several glories in which, according to the Jews, the first temple had the superiority over the second. These were the Urim and Thummim, or the oracle of the high-priest; the Ark of the Covenant over the Mercy-seat; the Holy Fire, which descended on the altar and consumed the sacrifice; the Shechinah, or shining light, that indicated the Divine presence; and lastly, the Spirit of Prophecy. Now in all these particulars the second temple, and the dispensation figured by it, exceeded the former, as being honoured with the personal ministry of the Messiah, who is the Word of God, and the true Ark of a new and better covenant, ordained

for the redemption of mankind. He is the fire which came down from heaven, and by whose baptism sin is so effectually done away, that no other expiation is necessary to render man acceptable with his Maker. When this Saviour made his appearance upon earth, the Divine Presence was truly revealed, for "in him dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. He was God manifest in the flesh; being the brightness of his Father's glory and the express image of his person." Finally, he was the great prophet and teacher of the church; for to him was given the Spirit without measure, "and of his fulness have all we received, even grace for grace." John, i. 16.

The signs, or outward marks of glory, which imparted such splendour to the tabernacle and first temple, were nothing more than typical allusions to what appeared conspicuously and efficaciously in the character and works of the Redeemer, who, as the high-priest of our profession, entered into the holiest of all; and, seated upon his throne of mediation, he ever liveth to make intercession for us. Having stated in what the renewed edifice should surpass the former, the prophet lays down certain points to determine the era when the glory should be revealed. The manifestation is introduced by a universal shaking of nations, which, in the symbolical language of Scripture, always denotes the subversion of kingdoms by internal commotions and the violence of foreign enemies. What was here foretold, actually occurred; for the Persian monarchy became a prey to the Macedonians, whose conquests were absorbed in the universal dominion of the Romans; which mighty power again, after subduing all the states that came within its reach, was rent with civil wars till Augustus cemented the strength of the empire by a universal peace. Such was the appropriate season when the

object desired by all nations being presented in the temple, gave rise to the divine hymn which the church has adopted for her daily use, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace according to thy word, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation; which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel." Luke, ii. 29—32.

As at this time there was a general expectation of some wonderful person, who should distinguish himself in an extraordinary manner for the benefit of mankind, it is plain that the desire must have been grounded on certain oracles, whose divinity was unquestioned, and their application limited to a determinate period. No predictions to this effect are recorded, but what are contained in the Hebrew Scriptures, and these were sufficiently circulated to render the promise of a deliverer famous throughout the East. But though the prophecy was literally fulfilled when the Lord of glory appeared upon earth, yet there is another sense in which it may be affirmed, that he is the desire of all nations. In a predictive view the second temple is the dispensation over which the Messiah presides, and not a material building made with hands. As the visible symbol of the Divine presence was the chief glory of that magnificent structure which Solomon erected at such a vast expense, so the personal administration of the Redeemer constitutes the perpetual privilege of his church. If the one was significant of the favour of God, and his acceptance of the services there offered, the other affords the assurance of life and immortality through the righteousness of the Mediator. Having made a full and perfect oblation for the sins of the whole world, by his voluntary sacrifice upon the cross, and having abolished death by his resurrection, he hath opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers. This work of salvation is carried on by his Spirit

according to the secret plan of Infinite Wisdom, and with unabated success, though the gates of hell are constantly employed to impede its progress. In the prophetic description of this mystic temple it is said by the Lord of hosts, "The silver is mine, and the gold is mine; and the glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, and in this place will I give peace." Our Lord came in a time of political tranquillity; but this is not the precise meaning of the promise, which indicates spiritual security and a general amnesty to offenders. So the riches here mentioned are not to be understood in the low sense of earthly treasures, but of the permanent blessings bestowed by the Redeemer, "who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption; that according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord." 1 Cor. i. 30, 31,

AUGUST THE TWENTY-EIGHTH.

THE GLORY OF THE TEMPLE.

Zechariah, vi. 13.—Even he shall build the temple of the Lord; and he shall bear the glory.

THIS prophet ministered while the second temple was building; and the object of his mission was to encourage the people in that good work by the assurance of complete success, and the promise of greater happiness in the latter days. The visions related in the former part of the book were not only intended to strengthen the faith of the men of that generation, but to stand upon record for the edification of the church in every age, whether looking for her Redeemer through the shadows of the law, or rejoicing under his government amidst the brightness

of the Gospel dispensation. This mystical scenery afforded a lively representation of the security of God's faithful servants, the suberviency of all nature to the order of Providence, and the direction of human events to the Divine glory. While the persons employed upon the sacred edifice were animated by the promise that the blessing of Jehovah accompanied them in their undertaking, they were comforted with an enlarged prospect of the system which that structure figured in its external form and ceremonial observances. The spiritual institution, framed in the eternal Mind and typified in the ordinances of the Mosaic ritual, is described as a stone laid before "Joshua the high-priest and his fellows, who are men wondered at;" or rather, who are men of wonderful character. Upon this stone, as watching over it, are seven eyes, and the lines engraved upon it are of the Divine operation; for "thus saith the Lord of hosts, I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day." It is evident, then, that the design thus emblematically set forth in the prophetic vision, is the plan of Infinite Wisdom for the redemption of man, every step of which was determined from the beginning, and must take effect exactly at the time and in the manner originally settled in the councils of Heaven. This scheme of salvation is the fixed object of the Divine attention; and though to us there are several degrees of knowledge, and periods of improvement, it is far otherwise in respect to the Supreme Intelligence, "with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." Whatever changes and impediments there may be to exercise our faith and patience, who with the utmost diligence and sagacity can discern only a small part of the works and ways of God, there are no revolutions or mysteries with Him whose will governs the universe, and to whose Spirit all consequences are equally present with the causes from whence they flow. In makin

known his purposes, he does indeed adopt such expressions as impress upon the human intellect the ideas of progressive observation, particular selection, and deliberate arrangement. Accordingly, in this prophecy the formation of the redeemed church is exhibited with all the circumstances of architectural contrivance, the slow labours of combined exertion, and the solemn grandeur of the temple service. Now, as, in every magnificent undertaking, the subordinate agents are unacquainted with the reason of the principles upon which they act, and the fitness of what they perform ; so it is in the complicated moral system, where one unerring rule goes on amidst much apparent confusion, arising from conflict of interests, the opposition of sentiments, and the variety of customs. While men have no other aim than the indulgence of their passions, and the security of those things upon which they have been accustomed to set an inordinate value, a secret Power directs their motives to other ends, and turns the devices formed upon them against the purposes they were intended to promote. Of this we have a remarkable instance in the history of the Messiah, who, according to the predictive picture of him, was to be both poor and persecuted, even to the greatest extremity of human suffering, yet ultimately to triumph over all his enemies, and to fill the earth with the splendour of his majesty. In this prophecy the Saviour makes his appearance, at first, in so mean a garb as to be rather repulsive than engaging ; which low condition stimulates the adversary of God and man to beset him with his wiles, and to attack him by the most malevolent accusations. From this contest, however, the despised and afflicted One arises with such glory, that, on account of his perfect righteousness, he is arrayed in the pontifical garments, and consecrated a king as well as a priest. The name of the typical character corresponded so exactly

with that of the Divine Person he represented, Joshua being the same with Jesus, that to doubt the application is to lessen the authority of the prophecy. When all the particulars of the vision are considered, a perfect coincidence will be observed between this symbolical delineation and his eventful history, who, by the purity of his life and his victory over sin and death, brought in everlasting redemption for his people, so that "other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." 1 Cor. iii. 11.

AUGUST THE TWENTY-NINTH.

BEAUTY OF THE REDEEMER.

Zechariah, ix. 17.—*How great is his goodness, and how great is his beauty!*

IN the former part of this prophecy the Messiah is described as laying the foundation of his church, and carrying on the building to full perfection; rising himself from the most abject humiliation to the mediatorial throne. Here he is set forth as removing all the obstacles laid to prevent the establishment of his kingdom, and bringing the most formidable powers under complete subjection. The heathen nations are changed by his appearance, and even the Jewish state undergoes a material revolution in the manifestation of her Lord. She loses her temporal dignity and warlike character, it is true; but then her sons are made the messengers of peace to the Gentiles, and the King of Zion "sends out his law from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth."

The "burthen of the oracle," or the matter with which the mind of the prophet labours, is the word

of the Lord ; and this, in the language of Scripture, always denotes the Divine Wisdom, or eternal Logos, essentially existing in the Deity, and yet personally manifest on various occasions as Jehovah and the Angel of the Covenant. He is both the Word and Wisdom of God, for by him the worlds were made and are governed ; by him man is enlightened with the knowledge of his duty, and by him alone can we be saved from the power and condemnation of guilt. When, therefore, we read that the subject of the revelation was the Word of the Lord, we are taught to understand every part of the description as referring to the coming of the Redeemer, and illustrative of the circumstances in which the church shall be placed under his administration. The prophetic historian delineates with minute accuracy the fate of those countries which were hostile to Judah, and thus she received an assurance that all the other predictions would be duly accomplished. Their ruin afforded an evident proof, that amidst the convulsions of society and the wrecks of nations the people of God were safe ; for so he declared in the prophecy which contained the denunciation of his vengeance, " I will encamp about mine house, because of the army, because of him that passeth by, and because of him that returneth : and no oppressor shall pass through them any more ; for now have I seen with mine eyes." The house here mentioned is the same with that described in the former vision, and undoubtedly means the righteous community gathered by the personal ministry of the Messiah. This spiritual fabric is continually advancing, and becoming more conspicuous as the world is darkened and disordered by political changes and scenes of blood. That fraud and violence should make way for truth and righteousness, may seem unaccountable ; but such is the method taken to correct the evils of which man complains in this chequered state, and thus he is

taught to derive comfort and instruction from the afflictions by which he is surrounded and oppressed. The rapacity of ambition prepared the earth for the advent of the Messiah, whose manifestation is marked in the prophecy by an incident which corresponded so minutely with what actually occurred, that the reader of the Scriptures is surprized at the unbelief of those who witnessed the scene. It was foretold that the King of Zion should make his entry into Jerusalem "meek and lowly, riding on an ass." This prediction was literally verified; but though the inhabitants of the city were moved on the occasion, instead of acknowledging the Divinity of the Person who gave this testimony of his mission, and supported it by his miracles, the chief-priests and rulers immediately began to concert measures for putting him to death. The success of these zealots was no doubt very perplexing to those who thought that the object of persecution was the deliverer of Israel. But even here the wisdom of God appeared triumphant over the folly of man; for this ignominious death was combined with the Divine purpose, and had been declared in the predictive history. The decree by which the Saviour was appointed to his great work, is thus expressed in the prophecy: "As for thee also, by the blood of the covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water. Turn ye to the refuge, ye prisoners of hope; even to-day do I declare that I will render double unto thee." This blood of the Messiah's covenant is the pouring out of his own, as the ransom for the prisoners lying in the state of the dead, and waiting for redemption in the resurrection of their Lord. After his conquest over the grave, the progress of his Gospel is represented as equalling the velocity of the lightning, and the power of his doctrine is felt throughout the earth as the voice of God. Such is the view exhibited in this prophecy of the Saviour in

his humbled and glorified state, laying down his life to free man from the sentence of condemnation, and rising again, that all who believe in him may be made partakers of a glorious immortality. Well then does it become us to adopt the language with which this description concludes, and say of our gracious Benefactor, "How great is his goodness, and how great is his beauty!" Unspeakable, indeed, was that love which induced the Son of God to take upon him our nature, and therein to endure inconceivable misery, that he might rescue sinners from eternal death. Indescribable is the beauty of that system by which the moral confusion of the world is turned to good, and the souls of men are brought out of darkness into the light of truth. The change produced by the Gospel resembled that glad season when, after laborious preparation and patient waiting, the earth yields her increase, and "the vallies are covered over with corn; they shout for joy, they also sing." Ps. lxxv. 15.

AUGUST THE THIRTIETH.

UNIVERSAL REDEMPTION.

Zechariah, xiv. 21.—*There shall be no more the Canaanite in the house of the Lord.*

WHAT is here said of the temple founded by the Messiah deserves serious attention, because, while it seems at variance with other predictions, which give the most encouraging invitations to the penitent of all nations, it does in fact confirm those promises, by the assurance that there shall henceforth be no more any distinction between the believers of the stock of Israel and the proselytes of the gate. The former part of the prophecy exhibits a view of the Re-

deemer submitting to the meanest condition, and, after being sold for thirty pieces of silver, acting in a judicial capacity towards his rebellious people. Their iniquity in preferring a foreign yoke to the dominion of their legitimate Lord, is punished by the rapacity of the oppressor, who devours the choicest of the flock and fills the land with his cruelties. From this dismal prospect the oracle recalls us to a consideration of the national guilt, in piercing the King of Zion, as the sole cause of the calamities here depicted. But awful as this scene may be, it is one rich with consolation and full of inestimable benefits; for the wound inflicted in the spotless victim, is the source of an inexhaustible stream for the purgation of sin, and the healing of the nations. This fountain cleft in the Saviour's side, and from whence flowed blood and water, is said to be "opened to the house of David, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem;" not that the purifying virtue of the offering is confined to one family or district, but to denote the person and place of the sacrifice. Throughout the prophetic Scripture the Messiah is uniformly declared to be the offspring of David according to the flesh; and with equal clearness is it affirmed, that before his throne shall be established he must suffer at Jerusalem. But defined as the origin of the Divine Spring is, with respect to the time and manner of its appearance, the course of it is far from being limited within any prescribed channel; neither are the blessings imparted by it confined to any description of persons. On the contrary, it is stated that the opening of the fountain shall be followed by the extinction of idolatry, which is a proof that the stream so to be poured forth is the measure ordained for the conversion of the whole heathen world to the knowledge of the true God. That the mercy here foretold is not the peculiar property of the Jewish commonwealth, appears farther from the denunciations uttered against

Jerusalem, which is threatened with all the horrors of war, and its inhabitants with captivity. This prediction had its accomplishment when the capital of Judea was sacked by the Romans, who took away from the Jews their place and nation, so that ever since they have been without any settled home, altar, or priesthood. The city, therefore, described in these prophetic visions, and out of which flow the waters of life, must be a spiritual community, and the temple that constitutes its highest glory is the covenant of grace, sealed by the blood of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

As a distinguishing characteristic of this edifice, it is said that there shall be no Canaanite "within its walls;" instead of which, some translators would read, "no trafficker," merely because the word is by a rhetorical figure used in this sense, the natives of that country being famous for their cunning in mercantile pursuits. But the construction of the prophecy requires us to take the term as a proper name, and applied to the descendants of a person under the Divine malediction. In the new Jerusalem there is no more curse; and wherever the Gospel of peace comes, it cancels the sentence of condemnation against sinners, and puts an end to all typical distinctions between men on account of their origin and situation; so that "henceforth ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." Ephes. ii. 19—22.

AUGUST THE THIRTY-FIRST.

ADVENT OF THE MESSIAH.

Malachi, iii. 1.—*The Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple.*

THE concluding verse of the preceding chapter exhibits an awful picture of the national character at the time when the Lord, by his herald, gives notice of his approach. While the most debasing superstition prevails among the mass of the people, their rulers are given up to an irreligious spirit, saying, "Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delighteth in them, or where is the God of judgment?" If this description is compared with the history of the Jewish state, we shall have no difficulty in determining the application, nor will any doubt be entertained as to the accomplishment of the oracle. It was precisely in such an unbelieving age that the Baptist issued from the desert, and enforced upon crowded auditories the necessity of repentance to fit them for the kingdom of heaven, which was then at hand. But the austere manners of the harbinger were attributed to demoniacal frenzy; and the benevolent deportment of his Lord was so little respected by his bigoted enemies, that they scrupled not to call him "a glutton and a wine-bibber, the friend of publicans and sinners." Matt. xi. 19. Thus was the prediction verified, and the precursor sent to announce the Saviour's coming, befitted a King whose throne, instead of being established by carnal weapons and distinguished by the pageantry of this world, obtains its seat in the hearts of men, and acquires glory in bringing sinners to the life of righteousness. The Divine Person here promised is the Angel of the Covenant, who appeared to the patriarchs, and conducted the tribes from Egypt

through the wilderness; who gave the law from Sinai, and filled the tabernacle and the temple with his glory. He is here called by his proper name of Jehovah, for the church of old never expected any other deliverer than the self-existent and everlasting God. At the time of his appearance there was a general looking for him; and though the body of the nation had false notions of his character and government, they never attempted to deny the Divinity of the Messiah, whose coming was universally expected. So far, indeed, were the Jews from lowering the dignity of Him whom they sought, that when he actually came they charged him with blasphemy for assuming a title which they declared to be the exclusive property of the Deity. They knew that their sacred books had explicitly affirmed the absolute Godhead of the Redeemer; but from this magnificence they erroneously concluded that he would manifest himself with the ensigns of royalty and the splendour of a conqueror. Their sensualized minds could not endure that the prophet foretold by their legislator should come out of the despised country of Galilee, much less that a poor mechanic could be the Anointed One of God. When, therefore, the Messenger of the Covenant came to his inheritance, he was rejected by those who professed to seek for him, because he discouraged the false notions which they fondly cherished concerning the nature of the Messiah's kingdom. The sudden entrance of the Lord into his temple, implies the unprepared state of those who were the objects of his ministry, and the disordered condition in which he should find the sacred edifice. Watchfulness was so necessary a part of the Levitical office, that the entrance of a stranger into the temple could never be properly sudden as long as they who had the care of it attended to their duty. Yet the prophet declares that the Lord will come suddenly to his temple; and the sense is im-

mediately determined by this strong exclamation. "Who may abide the day of his coming, and who shall stand when he appeareth?" As this language is expressive of the depravity and indolence which should prevail at the advent of the Messiah, so what follows shows the design of his visit to be for the purgation of corruption and the renewal of the sacerdotal office. He sits as a refiner, who with incredible pains separates the precious metal from the ore; and as a fuller, who labours to cleanse the polluted garment from all its stains. Thus does the prophecy represent Jehovah as coming in person to his temple; and thus did he actually enter it for the exercise of his judicial authority upon the defilers of the building, saying, "My house is the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves." Luke, xix. 46. Here also he proclaimed his covenant aloud, when on the great day of the feast he cried to the people, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink." John, vii. 37. But neither his visitation in judgment, nor his calls of mercy, could bring the people to repentance. They rejected the Lord of life, and sealed their condemnation in his blood; soon after which the seed of Jacob were dispersed, but not consumed, being reserved by Jehovah for his second coming, when the voice from heaven shall say, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people; and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." Rev. xxi. 3, 4.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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